

Love before tradition

DO you remember hearing someone sing the following words? "Matchmaker, matchmaker, make me a match. Find me a find, catch me a catch... make me a perfect match."

It is from *Fiddler on the Roof*, the Broadway musical which opened in 1964. For many, if not for the majority of you reading this column, that show will seem like something from the Beatles era of musical history, but it's a good story.

It is set over a 100 years ago in Tsarist Russia, just before the great revolution, and centres on Tevye, his wife Golda and the matchmaker who is to meet with mum and dad and match three of their five daughters to prospective husbands. But times are changing, the old traditions are crumbling and the girls want to choose their own husbands. The eldest daughter is supposed to marry some wealthy guy but she falls in

love with a poor tailor. At the beginning, her father is not having any of it, but in the end he reluctantly gives his blessing to their marriage. How many of you fathers at sea can recall giving in to your daughter's wishes? Many, I would suspect.

Then along comes the second daughter and a repeat performance, but in her case she just goes off to marry a soldier who is in Siberia of all places. I mean no disrespect to Siberia, but Yalta is surely more romantic.

The third daughter has fallen in love with a Gentile and that is unforgivable so her father refuses to give her away in marriage. The couple elope and it is decreed that her name is not to be brought up in conversation in the family home ever again.

Fiddler on the Roof is a story about a good man whose traditions became more important to him than the com-

mandment to love and forgive as God loves and forgives. Tradition over love was the bone of contention.

We can, without too much thought, easily skim through our Bibles and see the scribes and Pharisees in a bad light. But they were good people, dedicated Jews like Tevye, keeping the religious tradition – grace before and after meals and they were always at worship on Friday night. They turned eastward in prayer three times a day and washed their hands as a sign of piety.

And today we, of whatever creed, need to follow the commandment of love and mercy so that we can avoid the conflicts of religion which can end up with the loss of innocent lives. Religion can so easily be a source of conflict rather than of harmony. From the Crusades of the past, to Northern Ireland, the Middle East and beyond, we have seen the commandment

of tradition take over from the commandment of love. Within the Christian faith itself we have seen conflicts such as whether evolution and Genesis are incompatible, whether the earth is round or flat, about the ordination of women, and much more.

Some religious traditions will probably change in the coming years, but some will remain unchanged, causing those who do not conform to them to be rejected and unloved. Thank God then that he never withdraws his love for us, even when we do not live up to his expectations. St Paul tells us in his letter to the Romans that nothing can separate us from the love of God, neither height, nor depth, nor principalities, nor power: nothing.

Traditions are traditions and of course they have their place, but they surely must not replace the commandment of love.