Todays’ gospel could not be more timely. Our country faces a dilemma brought into focus by the predicament of the young woman (Shamima Begum) now in diplomatic Limbo after having left this country to join ISIS and who now seeks to return with her baby. It is not my intention to say *what* you should think in this specific case. But it is important *that* we think and *how* we think in such situations.

The British author, C.S. Lewis, of the *Tales of Narnia* fame, also wrote books about his Christian faith. One such book: *The Four Loves*: describes how our single English word *Love* is inadequate or lacks precision when applied without further qualification. He categorizes love broadly into four types: *Affection*, *Friendship*, *Erotic* and *Charity* (*Caritas* - *Agape*). It is this fourth of these categories that most reflects the form of love we seek to emulate when we seek to be compassionate as God is compassionate. This is the kind of Charity we pray will characterise our lives as Christian disciples.

I want to elaborate on this with the help of a French diocesan priest called Michel Quoist, who lived for the most part a typical life as a priest. He worked for a time with young people, had several stints as a parish priest, did some administrative work and supported those of his colleagues who responded to the call to leave Europe and minister in Latin America. What brought him the attention of a wider public was the publication of some of his prayers. They came from the heart, and concerned real everyday feelings and situations. This resonated with many people, and I think he can be trusted in what he says about Charity. He says:

*The theological virtue of charity is the mysterious power, communicated by grace, to love as God loves.* So, it is something bigger than we can comprehend, it is shared by communication with God and between ourselves and it enables us to reflect something of God’s love for others albeit in a less than perfect manner.

He wrote a short reflection on love (charity) using

images drawn from different human activities and endeavours; Fashion, Homemaking, Mountaineering, Sailing,

And he presents *Caritas*, (*Agape*, Love):

as a constantly challenging, yet promising hope; characterised by set-backs but ultimately overcome with courage and determination, these not out of our own personal strength but because we are responding to a summons from God who is like the sea drawing to itself every trickle of streams and rivers.

*Love is not a ready-made garment,*

*But a piece of material to be cut and tailored.*

*It is not an apartment ready for occupation,*

*But a home to be designed, built, furnished and repaired.*

*Love is not a conquered peak,*

*But a daunting ascent with many obstacles and falls, Made in icy cold or fierce heat.*

*It is not a safe anchorage in a harbour of happiness, But a voyage on the open sea in storm and tempest.*

*Love is not a triumphant single ‘yes’, an affirmation of success, a magnificent final chord followed by clapping and cheers,*

*But a ‘yes’ repeated again and again throughout life, accompanied by ‘no’ repeated as many times, but overcome.*

*Love is not the sudden appearance of a new life,*

*Perfect from the moment of its birth,*

*But the flowing of a river from its source,*

*Sometimes in flood and sometimes only as a trickle of water, But always on its way to the infinite sea*.

*Unless you make a daily effort to see the world as God sees it, you will never get beyond mere appearances*. (Michel Quoist)