

Homily of Third Week of Lent, Year B

The first reading is about the commandments that God gave to the people of Israel when they left Egypt and on their way to the Promised Land. The Catholic Church summarized the first reading into Ten Commandments:

1. I am the Lord thy God, thou shall not have any gods before me.
2. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything.
3. You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.
4. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.
5. Honor your father and your mother.
6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.
10. You shall not covet your neighbor's house, wife, or property.

The Ten Commandments are called Decalogue (Greek: deka – ten, logos – word).

Every other commandments, laws and constitutions are only extensions and explanations of the Ten Commandments. It is because the Ten Commandments are neglected that we have so much confusion and crises in the world. Jesus says in Mark 7:13, "You nullify the word of God through the tradition you handed on." We are invited in the third week of Lent to reflect through the Ten Commandments and pray to be guided by them.

The first four of the Commandments guide us to love God, while the last six guide us to love our neighbor. That is why Jesus summarized the whole commandments as love of God and love of neighbor. To the man who asked Jesus which commandment is the first of all Jesus said, "You shall love the Lord your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength. And after this comes the second commandment: You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:30-31).

The people of Israel were not faithful to the Ten Commandments. The incident in the Gospel was an expression of such unfaithfulness. The vicinity of the temple of Jerusalem which was supposed to be a serene place of prayer was turned into a business place. Jews from all over the world were obligated to pay a special tax each year for the upkeep of the temple. But since Roman and Greek coins were stamped with images of their gods and emperors, these coins could not be used to pay the temple tax. Thus, money changers gathered in the temple area and exchanged these pagan coins for Jewish coins that could be used for temple business. The money changers cheated the people by offering them very low exchange rate. It was the same case with those who sold sacrificial animals for temple sacrifice; they also sold the animals to pilgrims at exorbitant prices. We can, therefore, see why Jesus whipped the businessmen out of the temple area. They operated their business without regards to love of God and love of neighbor.

If Jesus visits our churches, will he be happy with us or will he make whip out of cords and drive us out of the church area? If he finds us gathered with sincere love of God and neighbor, he will be happy with us. But if he finds us calling 'Lord' 'Lord' while our hearts are far from the Lord, he will, surely, drive us out!

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