

Homily of Third Sunday of Lent Year B, 2021

Exodus 20:1-17; Psalm 19:8-11; 1 Corinthians 1:22-25; John 2:13-25

In the first reading, from the Book of Exodus, the Israelites had left Egypt, and were no longer under Pharaoh and the laws of Egypt. God did not leave his people lawless in the wilderness. Scripture tells us that God revealed the commandments to Moses at Mount Sinai (Exodus 20:1-17). The commandments were to guide the Israelites' relationship with God, and relationship with one another. The Catechism of the Catholic Church summarizes the commandments as follows:

1. I am the Lord your God, you shall not have any gods before me.
2. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.
3. Remember to keep holy the Lord's Day.
4. Honor your father and your mother.
5. You shall not kill.
6. You shall not commit adultery.
7. You shall not steal.
8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
9. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.
10. You shall not covet your neighbor's goods.

The Ten Commandments are called the Decalogue (Greek: deka – ten, logos – word). The first three of the commandments guide relationship with God, while seven of the commandments guide relationship with neighbors. During our 40 days of the Lenten Season, which represents the 40 years of Israelites' journey in the desert, God draws our attention, again, to the commandments, to guide our relationship with him and our relationship with one another. The Ten Commandments is one of the Church's teachings handed on to us as soon as we reach the age of reasoning and understanding. Today, God invites us, to remember our very beginning, what we have forgotten, how we no longer care, and how we have fallen shot.

By God's grace, may I cherish the words of the Psalmist, "The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul. The decree of the Lord is trustworthy, giving wisdom to the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart. The command of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eye" (Psalm 19:8-9).

In the gospel reading, the Jews showed no regards to the commandments. The vicinity of the temple of Jerusalem which was supposed to be a serene place of prayer was turned into a business place. Jews who came from all over the world for the feast of Passover were made 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 stayed in the temple area and exchanged pagan coins for Jewish coins. 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. The people who did business in the temple vicinity were cheating and stealing in the name of God. Hence, Jesus "made a whip out of cords and drove them all out of the temple area, with the sheep and oxen, and spilled the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables, and to those who sold doves he said, 'Take these out of here, and stop making my Father's house a marketplace'" (John 2:15-16).

St. John remarks that Jesus was speaking about the temple of his body. In the same sense, St. Paul reminds us, "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it" (1 Corinthians 12:27). St. Paul also asks, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? (1 Corinthians 6:19). During this Lenten Season, I am to reflect if my temple area has become a "marketplace," and invite Christ crucified, "the power of God and the wisdom of God" (second reading, 1 Corinthians 1:25) to cleanse me. I pray with the Psalmist, "Cleanse me with hyssop, that I may be pure; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow" (Psalm 51:9). Amen.

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