

## FIRST READING: Exodus 20:1-17

A reading from the Book of Exodus:

In those days, God delivered all these commandments: "I, the LORD, am your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that place of slavery. You shall not have other gods besides me. You shall not carve idols for yourselves in the shape of anything in the sky above or on the earth below or in the waters beneath the earth; you shall not bow down before them or worship them. For I, the LORD, your God, am a jealous God, inflicting punishment for their fathers' wickedness on the children of those who hate me, down to the third and fourth generation; but bestowing mercy down to the thousandth generation on the children of those who love me and keep my commandments. "You shall not take the name of the LORD, your God, in vain. For the LORD will not leave unpunished the one who takes his name in vain. "Remember to keep holy the sabbath day. Six days you may labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD, your God. No work may be done then either by you, or your son or daughter, or your male or female slave, or your beast, or by the alien who lives with you. In six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them; but on the seventh day he rested. That is why the LORD has blessed the sabbath day and made it holy. "Honor your father and your mother, that you may have a long life in the land which the LORD, your God, is giving you. You shall not kill. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male or female slave, nor his ox or ass, nor anything else that belongs to him."

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 19:8, 9, 10, 11.

***Lord, you have the words of everlasting life.***

The law of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul; The decree of the LORD is trustworthy, giving wisdom to the simple.

***Lord, you have the words of everlasting life.***

The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the command of the LORD is clear, enlightening the eye.

***Lord, you have the words of everlasting life.***

The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever; the ordinances of the LORD are true, all of them just.

***Lord, you have the words of everlasting life.***

They are more precious than gold, than a heap of purest gold; sweeter also than syrup or honey from the comb.

***Lord, you have the words of everlasting life.***

SECOND READING: 1 Corinthians 1:22-25

A reading from the first Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians:

Brothers and sisters: Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, Jews and Greeks alike, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

The word of the Lord.

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to John:

Since the Passover of the Jews was near, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. He found in the temple area those who sold oxen, sheep, and doves, as well as the money changers seated there. He 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." His disciples recalled the words of Scripture, Zeal for your house will consume me. At this the Jews answered and said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and you will raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking about the temple of his body. Therefore, when he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they came to believe the Scripture and the word Jesus had spoken. While he was in Jerusalem for the feast of Passover, many began to believe in his name when they saw the signs he was doing. But Jesus would not trust himself to them because he knew them all, and did not need anyone to testify about human nature. He himself understood it well.

The Gospel of the Lord.

### **Reflection for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Lent**

What do the Ten Commandments, the mystery of Jesus' cross and Jesus' cleansing of the Temple of Jerusalem have in common? They are the readings for this Sunday. I ask a question like this each week as I prepare a homily or, as I have for the past year, a reflection. At first glance there seems to be little common message. Most weeks, one can find commonality between the first reading and the gospel. Not this week though. As a matter of fact, Jesus' actions in the gospel seem to run contrary to the spirit and letter of the Ten Commandments. Jesus is outraged, angered and violent as he stormed the Temple precincts to drive the crooks out of the place. I learned a method to link the three readings. Begin with the second reading to find thematic content.

"We proclaim Jesus crucified!" Paul said. The cross is a stumbling block within Judaism and foolishness to pagans. How could one of the central mysteries of the Christian faith prevent people from believing? The cross leads us to salvation. The cross is the sign of God's forgiveness. How could the Good News of Jesus itself be a barrier to faith? What does the reading from Exodus say? It gives the ten things to do to be saved. That's not accurate. The Ten Commandments tell us to do two things; keep holy the Sabbath and honor your parents. The other eight commandments tell us what we may not do. Herein lies the problem.

To Paul, all we need is faith in God and faith in Jesus to be saved. With the gift of faith we receive the gift of salvation. With the gift of salvation all we do and say will reflect our faith. As we live we give witness to the fact that God has saved us. God died for our sins. The saving action did not come from our good behavior. It came through a free and loving act of Jesus who took upon himself all our sin, pain and faults to die in our place. This to a believing Jew will make no sense. Salvation comes from righteous human acts, following the commandments. For us it is a gift that comes through an act of God, Jesus' death on the cross.

For the pagans, acts of the gods were heroic. Jesus died a death of a criminal. He was executed in a public and humiliating way. Who in their right minds would follow a guy like Jesus? Pagan mythology is full of heroes; Heracles, Odysseus and Athena to name a few. Jesus claimed to be God's son but the former were semi-divine men and one goddess. Jesus rose from the dead, as we believe, but to Jews and pagans no one could return from the grave. Yet we all believe in Jesus and the salvation he won for us. God's forgiveness is as near as our asking God for mercy.

Salvation is a gift from God. Forgiveness is the way that God has chosen to reveal to us his love. We do what is right and avoid doing what is wrong by God's loving grace. If we fail, and failure comes from being human, God forgives us. This makes little sense to Jews and Greeks alike. We can rely on God's compassion and mercy because God is love; infinite, eternal and unconditional. Given God's nature as seen through eyes of faith, this makes good sense at least to you and me.

Jesus summed up God's Law in one commandment (which is really three). When asked as to which is the greatest command of God, Jesus said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with your entire mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love God, self and neighbor; that's it. What's more, we can do this because God first loved us as written in the First Letter of John, "We love because God first loved us."

Jesus' recitation of the greatest commandment comes directly from the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy. I always want to portray Judaism as the precursor to Christianity. Our scriptures, our liturgy, our prayers, our world view and experience of God have deep roots in the Jewish Traditions and faith. The basis for the Ten Commandments comes from God's Love. God created the world as a place where human beings can live and thrive. God has created families and a nurturing environment for loving people. God led people from slavery in Egypt to life in the Promised Land. Wherever people went, God went with them. In all trials and troubles people could know God's presence. God chose salvation for God's people. The Commandments are the guide. Our guide is Jesus who accompanies us always. We follow these Ten because God gives us what we need to do so.

Paul also revealed a deeper truth. We believe in the God we cannot see. How do we know that our faith is not absurd or foolish? We don't. That's the mystery of faith. We trust the God we cannot see. We trust the words of God we haven't heard. We follow a vision of a man we've never met. Yet we know God and have come to know God's Word. We can catch a glimpse of the Kingdom of God. How? Because God has given us the grace to believe. "When two or three gather in my name, I am in their midst." Jesus promised us. We have experienced him among us. We have come to, "know him in the breaking of bread." Paul's words today reveal the depths of his faith.

Context, in scripture, is always important. Jesus cleaned out the Temple in all four gospels. The synoptic gospels placed the story close to Jesus' passion. For them, Jesus' violent actions led directly to the authorities desire to kill Jesus. In John it happened in chapter two, just after Jesus began his public mission and ministry. The gospel of John used signs and symbols that point to the identity, mission and ministry of Jesus. Was the Temple of Jerusalem really God's house? Is Divine Savior's Church God's house? God lives with God's people not locked up in a gold box behind locked doors. The temple was the house of God's people and our parish church is where God's people gather. When we gather, we become the Church. Jesus' home is within and among us.

The Temple was a place of pilgrimage. Jews came to it from all over the world. They offered sacrifices as offerings to forgive their sins. Animals were the sacrifices. They were bought, butchered and roasted to the glory of God. They weren't incinerated. God had no use for food. God received the aromas of cooking. The temple priests, attendants and their families ate the food offered. God's delight was in cooking smells and the camaraderie of feasting. The animals were available for people to purchase and sacrificed as part of Jewish ritual.

Coins were a problem. Jews have no depiction or image of God. Any image of divinity is an idol and forbidden in the Ten Commandments. Since nations and empires depicted kings, emperors and pharaohs as divine, their image made the coins people carried as idols. The temple had its own coinage. Only the temple's currency was legal tender for offering. There had to be money-changers for commerce to take place. Jesus would have known of these necessities. So did his actions reveal something else?

In today's story, it is not the location of the temple that contained divinity. It is Jesus who is truly God. He was the living temple. Jesus predicted how he would first die and then rise after three days to life. From the beginning of Jesus public life, we know that his mission is the cross and that his resurrection would verify all he did and promised. This event happened on the Passover. Jews commemorate how the Angel of Death passed over them and that they, as a nation, passed over from slavery to freedom as God's people. Jesus proclaimed, in this passage, that he would pass over from death on the cross to rise from the dead on Easter. Jesus drove the live-stock, animal handlers and money-changers from the area. Doesn't the presence of Jesus drive out sin in the lives of the repentant? Another Passover, yet to come, would mark the culmination of Jesus' mission. Jesus would pass over death and carry us with him to new life. John has crafted a story with meaning on many levels meant for us to discover the richness of God's Word and effectiveness of Jesus' saving act.

The story, at the end, told us that the disciples put the puzzle together after Jesus died and rose from the dead. As the story unfolded, the disciples were in the process of coming to faith. Resurrection was the final piece they needed. We have read this passage from a post Easter perspective. We have the advantage of knowing Jesus identity as believers. God's presence moved from a place to a person; from the Temple to Jesus himself. Jesus' actions were another epiphany, a revelation and sign of his divinity. From the disciple's perspective, at the time, they did not make sense until Easter. From ours, we can see a broader picture. Jesus made a promise and passed on his mission to the apostles and to us at the end of the gospel of Matthew, "Full authority in heaven and on earth has been committed to me. Go therefore to all nations and make them my disciples; baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all that I have commanded you. I will be with you always, to the end of time." Since we believe and trust Jesus, both his promise and mission have become ours.

The Ten Commandments can be seen as obligations. By God's grace we can see them as invitations to live a new life grounded in God, based on God's gifts and led by Jesus' cross. We live risen in Christ and strive by our witness for the Kingdom of God.

May Jesus loving actions inspire and lead us to new life.

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