

Homily for 3rd Lenten Sunday (B)

March 2, 2018

Intro:

Ordinarily I preach on the gospel, but the Ten Commandments have such a deep place in our Catholic faith and are so needed in today's America, that I want to address it. You may find this homily not very inspiring, but I hope it will be illuminating.

The Decalogue contains the basic principles of the more extensive Jewish law. We think of it as the two tables of the Law given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai. **[SHOW]**

On the left side are the three commandments that relate us to God, and on the right are the seven commandments that relate us to our neighbor. What we learn from this is that being just to one's neighbor is what God wants, is service and worship of God. That is the first point we learn from the Ten Commandments about our religious service of God.

The second point is that the Ten Commandments lay down the principles upon which any society must be based.

First Commandment: there must be a commitment to a God who liberates his people, the one God who is creator of heaven and earth. All other gods lead to illusion and sin.

Second: "You shall not take the name of God in vain" means you cannot swear by God to something that is false. That is why our secular courts have people swear on the Bible. Truth in law courts is essential for the justice that God demands of his people.

Third: Keep holy the Sabbath is not only about time for God, but also time for family, servants, even animals. Everything needs a day of rest,, one rooted in God. Thus this command belongs both to the first tablet and the second. It now includes also concern for the fields, environment.

Fourth: Honor your father and mother means not only obedience to them as children, but care for them in their old age. It is their social security system. This command protects the order and integrity of the family as the basic unit of society.

Fifth: Thou shalt not kill excludes murder, abortion euthanasia; it protects the most fundamental right, the right to life.

Sixth: Thou shalt not commit adultery also protects the integrity of the family.

Seventh: Thou shalt not steal protects the right to private property, which is the basis for people's providing for family and their long-term security.

Eighth: Thou shalt not bear false witness is again a demand for truth in speech even beyond a formal oath taken before God, and in situations outside of court. Truthful speech is essential for the integrity of community.

Ninth and Tenth: forbid the kind of desire which immediately leads to action. Coveting means the kind of fostering of urgent a desire as the beginning of unjust taking of wife or other goods.

Thus the ten commandments prescribe all the actions which protect religion, the law courts as instrument of

justice, the sanctity of human life, the sanctity of the family, the right to private property, and even proscribes the kind of interior lust or covetousness which leads to crime. These are the laws upon which any society must be built.

And a third point is that the commandments describe the *minimum* actions necessary for society to flourish. It prohibits what we would call criminal activity. If we observe the ten commands we are not really all that virtuous; we are just decent citizens. We use the Decalogue as an examination of conscience, but we really, as Christians, should use a more demanding ethic. Although the Old Testament law has some prescriptions which ask for a deeper action of loving one's God and one's neighbor, these are few and quite subtle. It is Jesus who shows us that to be truly virtuous, truly authentic as a human being, one must rise beyond justice to compassion, and then to merciful acts, and to love in all our dealings with others, even our enemies. It is his life and teaching which ought to be the basis of our Christian examination of conscience.

Here's the point of Lent:

In a world which does not acknowledge sin, the Ten Commandments reveal the ways in which God's desires for a just society are violated everywhere. We are sinners, and we need to repent.

We express our contrition and our repentance in our prayers and in our Lenten liturgies. We acknowledge this especially in our Lenten act of reconciliation in common here in church.

But even more, at our Masses, we acknowledge that we fall short of God's mercy and forgiveness in Christ that summons us to greater acts of compassion and forgiveness of others.

We express this by the CRS boxes in which we share. Our fasting enables us to share by the CRS boxes with those who are suffering from the world's sins of greed and exploitation. If we are faithful, this Lenten act of sharing will carry over into commitment and sharing throughout the year. That is the point of our gathering each Sunday, to receive Christ's love for us through his death and resurrection, which we hope will empower us to give our own lives to him in our suffering world.

We hope to become the good news for our world.