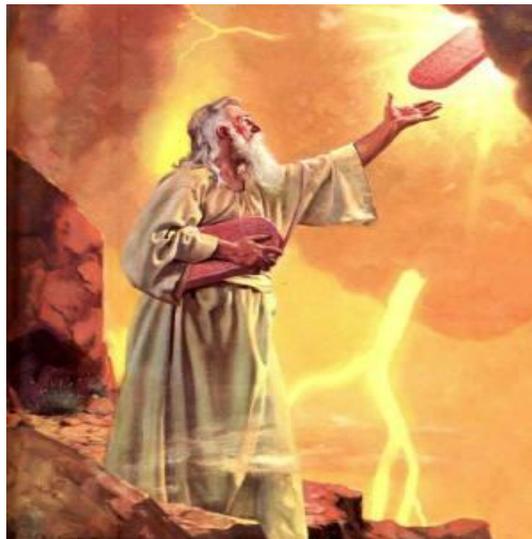




LENTEN JOURNEY – WEEK 3

God's giving of the 10 commandments

The Ten Commandments are entrusted to God's covenanted people, to serve as guideposts and signs to the world of the ethical laws which God's people willingly and generously embrace.



Abba Daniel said, 'At Babylon, the daughter of an important person was possessed by a devil. A monk, for whom her father had a great affection, said to him, "No one can heal your daughter, except some anchorites whom I know; but if you ask them to do so, they will not agree because of their humility.

Let us therefore do this: when they come to the market, look as though you want to buy their goods and when they come to receive the price, we will ask them to say a prayer and I believe she will be healed."

When they came to the market, they found a disciple of the old men sitting there, selling their goods and they led him away with the baskets, so that he should receive the price of

them. But when the monk reached the house, the woman possessed with the devil came and slapped him.

But the anchorite only turned the other cheek, according to the Lord's Command. (Matt. 5.39) The devil, tortured by this, cried out, "What violence! The commandment of Jesus drives me out."

Immediately the woman was cleansed. When the old men came, they told what had happened and they glorified God saying, "This is how the pride of the devil is brought low, through humility to the commandment of Christ."

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Yes, the commandments of God have a definite holy purpose and end in mind. Maybe we have never noticed that before! Maybe we've thought of the commands of God as somehow only for those of long ago and see them as far removed from the sort of situations we typically encounter in our world

today. For sure, in North America, we've been socialized into thinking that our individual rights should take precedence over anyone telling us how to live our lives for the sake of the community's well-being.

Indeed, we may sometimes even see those restrictions placed upon us, as an affront to our human freedom. And oftentimes, we may even let that kind of thinking seep into our understanding of God's expectations for our behavior.

To counteract this mentality, we need to accept the fact that the commands which God gives us to follow, are intended to serve as a protection from the pitfalls of sin, that so often come our way, in order that we might fully realize the best version of ourselves.

In our first reading from the Book of Exodus, we hear about the TOP TEN! Often on late night TV, we can hear many top ten lists being expounded. And while most of those lists are

trivial and are intended for entertainment value only, the list of the Ten Commandments is an essential guide for all of God's people to integrate into their daily living and consciousness. So, if we have never taken the time to learn them by heart, that would be a great objective for our Lenten journey.

We are told in scripture that the Ten Commandments were given by God to Moses and God's chosen people who had escaped from slavery in Egypt and were now wandering in the desert! So, we can begin by asking, why does God give the Jews these Ten Commandments in the first place? And the answer is quite simple! Because he's entered into covenant with them! He's made them his adopted sons and daughters! He's promised to give them a land, flowing with milk and honey! God's promised to make their descendants as numerous as the star of heaven and the sands on the seashore! God knew that these commandments would

change their lives irrevocably and would unite them closer to Him than ever before. And so, it can be said that God gave the Jews these commandments because God knew the great destiny to which He had called them and the fastest way to get there!

From God's perspective, then, the Ten Commandments were a profound gift to his chosen people! They weren't meant to be viewed as restrictive or judicial judgments, that would lead to condemnation, but as ways of identifying those actions which might impede the progress of living one's life in a liberating and loving way! They weren't meant as an exhaustive list of what not to do either. They were meant to help God's chosen people to reach their fullest potentials and to actualize the designs which God had for their lives from the moment they were conceived in God's mind. As such, the boundaries of behavior, which the Ten Commandments establish, are meant to protect God's people

from the dangers of living a lesser human existence, from embracing a lesser quality of human life, than that which God desires for us.

These same commandments that God bestowed upon the Jewish nation--- akin to a lighthouse guiding the weary traveller to safety in the midst of a world of darkness and sin--- God graciously extends also to us Christians, who have become a part of God's Holy People through the suffering and death of Jesus Christ on the Cross. Indeed, all Christians embrace the message of St. Paul in our second reading today, which proclaims, "the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us, who are being saved, it is the power of God!"

Power is just another word for Grace! Grace is the ability God gives us, to live lives worthy of our calling! When we

embrace this grace, we start living in the presence of God, at all times. We become attuned to the Spirit's guiding voice and gentle nudge. We become sensitized and revved up by the Words of Jesus in our Gospel and eager to spread our faith in Christ with boldness! We acknowledge too that, because God created us and knows our deepest hopes and longings for love, peace, and justice--- for mercy and for belonging--- that transgressing the Commandments of God only leads human beings further into isolation, sin, distress, unhappiness, chaos, and broken human relationships.

Rejection of the Ten Commandments then, is tantamount to a fundamental choice of selfish desire over all-embracing love. It diminishes the ability of the power of God to actively work in us and through us to bring the message of salvation to all the world.

In this regard, the Ten Commandments principally serve to protect us from experiencing a diminishment of the power of

the love of God and neighbor, that Jesus proclaimed to be at the heart of all the commandments of God!

In particular, we'll find that the first three of the Ten Commandments safeguard our loving relationship with God, while the final seven, safeguard our loving relationship to other people. The Ten Commandments then, can help us to flesh-out what it truly means to love God and to love our neighbor as ourselves, in a consistent manner.

They also serve to protect the society in which we live from being directed by relativistic norms of behavior that may change with the passing wind or the latest whim. The church teaches that there is such a thing as an objective moral order, which means that some things are always wrong, regardless of the circumstances. The Ten Commandments highlight to us what some of those circumstances are. When we begin to see the commandments in this new light then,

our hearts should naturally want to leap with gratitude to God, who could have left us to our own resources to figure out how to live an authentic, fulfilling human existence in this sinful world, but instead, chose to give us the wisdom we needed to spiritually flourish and thrive in this passing world. So as we begin this third week of Lent, let us fully embrace the Ten Commandments, live the love which the Ten Commandments highlight, and strive to be the best version of ourselves and thereby, give greater honor, glory and praise, to God.