

HOM 3rd Sunday Lent 2024 B Mar 3

The Ten Commandments that God gave to Moses on two stone tablets are at the heart of the Jewish Law or the Mosaic Law which eventually was made up of 613 precepts.

The first three of the Ten Commandments have to do with our relationship with God. These three were on the first stone tablet. The next seven have to do with our relationship with neighbor, and these were inscribed on the second stone tablet.

That in itself is significant. It is a way of saying that our relationship with God must have priority – it must come first – before we can get our relationship with our neighbor right. Jesus Himself made this point when He was asked “*Which is the greatest commandment?*” in the Mosaic Law, and He answered: “*You shall love the Lord your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. The second is like it: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”*” (Matt. 22: 37-38)

As far as I know about one-third of the 613 precepts of the entire Mosaic Law have to do with how God’s people are to relate to Him, and most of these are about offerings – sacrifices -- that are to be made to God. We find such sacrifices to God even at the very beginnings of salvation history with Cain and Abel offering their sacrifices – with Abel’s sacrifice being pleasing to God but not Cain’s.

Noah offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God after the flood. Abram offers a sacrifice to God at Shechem when he arrives in the land of Canaan, and then, makes ready to offer his only son, Isaac, in obedience to God’s request.

In the Law of Moses which is part of God’s fifth incremental Covenant offer to Man of oneness with Himself, we can figure that about 200 or so of the 613 precepts have to do with offerings to God. These were carried out in desert by Moses and his brother Aaron, who were Levites, and also by other Levitical priests, usually at the entrance of the Dwelling Tent that housed the Ark of the Covenant. Eventually, when the Israelites were established in the Promised Land of Canaan, this was moved into the Jerusalem Temple on an altar in the innermost sanctuary – the Holy of Holies – where the Ark of the Covenant was on its own altar.

The laws of sacrifice in the Mosaic Law were kept by the remnant of Israelites -- now referred to as Jews because they lived in the tribal land of Judah. Their priests offered ritual sacrifices to God on their behalf, both before and after their 50-year exile in the 6th century BC – when the Jerusalem Temple had been destroyed. Upon their return and the rebuilding of the Temple, their Temple sacrifices resumed and continued up to the time of Jesus.

Each year, during the celebration of Passover, many thousands of Jewish pilgrims – the historian Josephus says 1-2 million -- came to Jerusalem to offer a sacrifice in the Temple. You can image how busy it got. Those merchants in the outer court of the Temple selling oxen, sheep, and doves – and the money changers who exchanged Roman coins for the necessary Jewish currency – were there in full force so to speak. Their goods and services were vital, and in big demand.

Was there some petty cheating going on? – some price gouging? Almost certainly, but that’s not why Jesus turned over their tables – and using a makeshift whip drove them out of Temple – and said they were turning His Father’s house into a “*Den of Thieves*” in Matthew’s Gospel account -- a “*marketplace*” in John’s account that we read from today. No, there was something more going on here, according to Pope Benedict XVI and other scholars.

The “*thievery*” that Jesus referred to meant that of the Jewish religious leaders who were leading God’s people away from God, refusing to recognize Him in Jesus, the Promised Messiah in the Flesh. The market place activity was no longer acceptable either, because the animal sacrifices prescribed in the Mosaic Law were about to give way to the saving sacrifice of Jesus in the New and Everlasting Covenant of the New Testament. Jesus thus cleansed the Temple of the animal victims that were no longer acceptable offerings, and made it ready for His Self-Offering – the acceptable sacrifice. Indeed, once this Oblation of Jesus took place, the Jerusalem Temple itself would be destroyed in 72 AD by the Romans and it would never again be rebuilt. NEVER, because we are witnessing the drama of salvation history play out toward its culmination in Jesus Christ. He is the new Temple, raised up in three day and replacing the old Temple. All those joined to Him by water and the Holy Spirit become part of that Temple which is His Mystical Body, the Church.

Yes, by Baptism, you and I became members of Jesus’ Mystical Body that new Temple, the Church. We are to live in oneness with Him here and now unto eternal life and to continue His saving work, first of all, by keeping the Commandments which He Himself fulfilled and by teaching others to do so. We are also to lead people to oneness with Him in the sacraments – first of all, family, relatives and friends. We are do our part to feed the hungry, to help the poor, the suffering, the un-educated, the uninformed, to welcome the law-abiding stranger, and to proclaim the truth about God and Man with love and courage in the home, the marketplace, the public square. We are to pray for the living and the dead.

And, as a people peculiarly God’s own, however, we are to offer a pleasing sacrifice to God. We are to join in Jesus’ saving oblation – His eternal Self-Offering to the Father unto the Cross and Resurrection for the life of the world – the salvation of all the willing. There is really only one place we can do this – at Mass – in Holy Communion with Jesus – lived out at all times in all circumstances in-between.

This will take us voluntarily to the Cross – a stumbling block for Jews and Muslims – foolishness to worldly people of every stripe and religion. St. Paul says that for all those who are called, however, it is the power and wisdom of God. The cross we speak of here is the Cross of obedience and love unto which Jesus offered Himself to the Father in praise and thanksgiving, and also from the Cross offered Himself to His Bride – the Church -- in the Sacrament of His Body and Blood.

If we are to have consummate nuptial oneness with Jesus, which is the only way we can enter into the Father’s House with Him – into the new heavens and the new earth beyond time with Him – it will be in voluntary oneness with Him unto the Cross for ourselves, for all those we hold dear, and for all whom God holds dear. It will be like Mary’s oneness with Him – and with her help. On Calvary she offered her dearly beloved Son to the Father -- and herself with Him – so that by the grace of the Holy Spirit poured out from this by Jesus and the Father through Mary – all could freely join in Jesus saving oblation.

Brothers and sisters, the Catechism teaches us that the Church must go the way of Jesus who is beckoning us to join in His Self-Offering NOW. He gave us His Mother to be Our Mother to aid us with this. St. Joseph stands ready to help with fatherly love and manly support. BE NOT AFRAID, Jesus tells us. (Luke 12: 32)

Here are the words to pray silently and sincerely at Holy Communion if you wish to accept Our Lord’s invitation – His proposal: I AM ALL YOURS O MOST LOVING JESUS, THROUGH MARY, YOUR MOTHER, WITH THE HELP OF ST. JOSEPH.