

3rd Sunday of Lent - B
Exodus 20:1-3, 7-8, 12-17;
I Corinthians 1:22-25;
John 2:13-25
Little Flower - 3/4/18

My Brothers and Sisters,

Tomorrow evening is our Lenten Penance Service where you will have an opportunity to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation. I hope as many of you as are able will participate. As we heard in the second reading on Ash Wednesday, "*We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God*" [II Cor. 5:20.] Today's first reading could not be more appropriate.

In today's first reading, we heard the biblical expression of the Ten Commandments. When we read the opening words, "*in those days, God delivered all these commandments,*" we might be tempted to believe that God imposed the Ten Commandments on human beings. Nothing could be further from the truth. God offered the Israelites a covenant, a relationship of love with him, in which he promised to make them his chosen people and to give them the promised land **if** they kept the Ten Commandments. Therefore, the first three commandments address their relationship to God and the last seven address their relationships with one another within the community. Christian morality is also covenant morality. Christian morality is our response to God's love for us in Jesus Christ.

Recently someone asked me how to examine her conscience. The traditional way is to look at our lives in light of the Ten Commandments. Over the centuries, the Church grouped almost all sins under one of the Ten Commandments. A second way is to examine our conscience in light of the ten key values embedded in the Ten Commandments. Those values are priorities, respect, worship, authority, life, sexuality, and communication and truth. A third way is to examine our conscience according to our relationships with God, others, the world, and ourselves. Of course, the parable of the last judgment reminds us that it is not enough to keep the Ten Commandments, i.e., to avoid doing wrong. We also have to do positive good, especially to those in need, for example, feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, and visiting the ill and the imprisoned.

Today's reading from Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians challenges us to examine our personal values. Paul reminds us that Christianity is inherently counter cultural. For example, throughout the Gospels, the Jews were always asking Jesus for signs of power. Jesus seemed powerless when he was crucified like a common criminal. The Greeks sought knowledge and wisdom. A crucified savior would make no sense to them. There was a time in the United States when Catholics were not well accepted in society. I sometimes wonder if the Church might have been better off then. As we have become more integrated into society, many of us have also bought into society's religion and values, values such as consumerism and secularism, rather than Gospel values. Faith and religion are no longer the priorities they once were.

Finally, in today's Gospel, Jesus was angry because the money changers were making his Father's house a marketplace. We were always taught that anger is a sin. At the same time, based on today's Gospel, our moral tradition has always recognized just or righteous anger. Jesus' anger, in this situation, was just and righteous. According to William Barclay, "What enraged Jesus was that pilgrims to the Passover who could ill afford it, were being fleeced at an exorbitant rate by the money-changers. It was a rampant and shameless social injustice—and what was worse, it was being done in the name of religion."¹

My brothers and sisters, as I mentioned, tomorrow evening is our Lenten Penance Service. I invite and encourage you to come to be reconciled to God, others, the world, and yourselves through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Jesus gave us the Sacrament of Reconciliation not to be a burden but as a gift.

¹William Barclay, Barclay's Daily Study Bible (NT), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "The Anger of Jesus (Jn 2:12-16 Continued)."