

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Lent - B  
Exodus 20:1-3, 7-8, 12-17;  
I Corinthians 1:22-25;  
John 2:13-25  
Little Flower - 3/7/21

My Brothers and Sisters,

In Scripture, a covenant is a relationship of love between God and his people. Covenant has been a key theme in the first readings the first three weeks of Lent.

Today's reading from Exodus presents the Ten Commandments. Many people mistakenly believe that God imposed the Ten Commandments on us. God did not impose the Ten Commandments on us. To understand the Ten Commandments, we have to understand them in the context of the Old Testament Covenant on Mount Sinai.

On Mount Sinai, God offered to enter into a covenant relationship with Israel. He promised to make Israel his chosen people, a holy people, a kingly people, a priestly people, and he promised to give them a land flowing with milk and honey, the Promised Land, if they kept the Ten Commandments. In other words, the Ten Commandments were the provisions of the Covenant. This has several implications for us.

God established the covenant with the community of Israel, not with the individual Israelites. Therefore, the commandments deal not just with the individual's relationship with God but also the individual's relationships with others. Likewise, the New Covenant in Christ's blood is not between God and individuals but between God and the Church. Therefore, the Christianity of Jesus is a Christianity of Church. We are called to be part of the believing, worshiping community and to be committed to the ministry and mission of the Church.

For the most part, the Ten Commandments are negative and specific. They were negative because they represented the outer boundaries of the covenant. Many Christians judge themselves good and even holy to the extent they keep the Ten Commandments. Although we have to keep them to be good or holy, keeping them does not make us holy or good or enable us to become the-best-version-of-ourselves. In the New Testament, Jesus calls us to love one another as he has loved us. In the parable of the Last Judgment in Matthew 25, Jesus will judge us on the basis of the positive good we do, especially for those who are most in need: feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, welcoming strangers, clothing the naked, caring for the sick, and visiting prisoners. "Amen, I say to you, whatever you do or do not do for one of these least brothers or sisters of mine, you do or do not do for me"

The Ten Commandments are specific because at that point in history God revealed his love for the Israelites very concretely. The introduction to the Ten Commandments is the historical prologue to the Covenant: "*I, the LORD, am your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that place of slavery.*" The historical prologue was a reminder of all that God had already done for them, bringing them out of slavery in Egypt, and, therefore, an assurance he could and would do all that he promised if they accepted kept the Ten Commandments. If Christian morality is our response to the God who first loved us, we need to remember and be grateful for all that God has already done for us.

My brothers and sisters, in today's Gospel, Jesus drove the sellers and money changers out of the temple. Many in Jerusalem began to believe in Him because of the signs he was working. The last verses, however, are ominous: "*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.*" Jesus' understanding of human nature has a negative connotation in these verses. However, I think it also explains how Jesus could and can be so forgiving and compassionate toward all those whom he met and toward us. Because he understands us, he understands that most of the wrongs we do or sins we commit are not done out of malice but out of weakness. Therefore, we need to be forgiving and compassionate toward ourselves and others.