

28th Sunday Ordinary Time Year “B”

October 9-10, 2021

Readings: Wisdom 7:7-11; Hebrews 4:12-13; Mark 10:17-30

While growing up, by either the tone of voice employed or the words used, my siblings and I learned the degree of urgency attached to a parental request or corrective. If our middle name was employed, the request carried a particular sense of urgency, signaling we were on thin ice! Today, we are invited to reflect upon our response to commands.

The Ten Commandments are a unique set of commands, a list that has held a sacred place in both the Jewish and the Christian tradition unrivalled by any other list known to humanity. Even apart from the specifically religious sense, they helped to form the basis for Western Law. They are depicted several times in the U.S. Supreme Court Building. Moses is depicted with two tablets in the south panel of the Courtroom Frieze, in the East Pediment, and in one of the Great Hall métopēs.¹

Most importantly, it is the way in which these commandments were transmitted that adds to their pre-eminence. The Decalogue literally comes from the mouth of God. It summarizes in a succinct and poignant manner how God first loved us, “I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”

The commandments were born from love and take on their fullest meaning in the context of the covenant. Our moral life finds its meaning in and through the new covenant of Christ’s blood freely poured out for us. The Law has not been abolished; rather we are invited to rediscover it in the person of Jesus who is its perfect fulfillment.

While difficult to judge the rich young man’s motives, it certainly seems akin to asking, “Lord, what is the least I can do to enter the Kingdom?” This attitude reduces the life of faith to squeaking by a Pass-Fail exam.

¹ “Symbols of Law” Information Sheet, Office of the Curator, Supreme Court of the United States

Before I took my driving exam, my siblings gave me some advice. If things are going fairly well, when you get to the final test- parallel parking- put the car in park and turn off the keys. Don't even try- if you hit a cone, it is an automatic fail! Don't cause an "accident" -Just pass!] What?! No, we are called to a life of the highest virtue. So, why would we settle for an attitude of sneaking in by means of the back door?

We are invited to regard the Ten Commandments as an essential framework for our life of faith, one that is addressed personally to each one of us. Jesus knows us in the depths of our hearts, even to the point of knowing what it may be that keeps us from fully committing to his invitation to sanctity. That may well differ from person to person. In the case of the young man, it was his inordinate attachment to created things. We may not struggle with this sin, but others.

Understood "in the context of the Exodus, God's great liberating event at the center of the Old Covenant," the Ten Commandments point out the conditions of a life freed from the slavery of sin- "the Decalogue is a path of life."² They are delivered amid a theophany, a personal encounter, a face-to-face revelation of God amidst His glory. There is nothing capricious, impersonal or arbitrary about how this happened.

When I sort through my daily mail, instinctively, I first open the letters that are hand-addressed. I suspect it is the personal touch, a recognition that someone took the time to write out my name. Traditional wedding etiquette has suggested that invitations are to be hand addressed.

Well, how much more infinitely personal are the two Tablets revealed to Moses? They express the implications of belonging to God through His loving covenant. Our lives are a *response* to God's loving initiative. Since the time of St. Augustine, the Ten Commandments have occupied a pre-eminent place in the catechesis of baptismal candidates and the faithful.

² cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph #2057

From St. Augustine, we receive the traditional numbering that we as Catholics use. Our Lutheran brothers and sisters use this same numbering, while the Orthodox Churches and Reformed communities have slightly different numbering. The content remains the same.

Since they express our fundamental duties toward God and neighbor, the Ten Commandments reveal in their primordial content grave obligations and are fundamentally immutable. Since they are given in love, let us receive them in love.

Let us be grateful for the guidance offered through the Scriptures and the Tradition of the Church that helps us to articulate in more detail the fundamental tenets of the moral life contained in the Ten Commandments.