

### **3rd SUNDAY OF LENT, CYCLE B**

*Exodus 20: 1-17+ Ps. 19: 8-11 + 1 Cor. 1: 22-25 + John 2: 13-25*

Holy Spirit Catholic Church: March 8, 2015

Today's responsorial psalm, Psalm 19, is a love song. On the Sundays of Lent we have been singing this psalm during the Preparation of the Altar and the Gifts, expressing our deep and abiding love for the God who gives us words which are in themselves life everlasting. These words of the Lord God are more precious than gold, stronger than death.

The psalmist, and all who pray this psalm, express great gratitude for the gift of the Law, the words of everlasting life flowing from the heart of God.

Moses receives the Law of the Lord on Mt. Sinai during the wandering of the Hebrew people in the desert on their way to the Promised Land. The Law is actually a collection of many laws which reveal to God's people how to live on this earth in freedom and love. The book of Exodus, from 20: 22 – 23:33, as well as the book of Leviticus, present literally hundreds of laws guiding the life of the people.

When you and I think of the Law given on Mt. Sinai through Moses to the people, our minds immediately turn to the 10 Commandments, which are the foundation of God's Law and from which all the other laws flow.

It is vitally important to remember when and where the 10 Commandments are given in order to understand the best way to put them into practice.

The Exodus story is the context of the 10 Commandments, a story of God's saving love for a ragtag bunch of slaves.

The preface to the Commandments, the verse right before the 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment sets the scene: *"I, the Lord, am your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that place of slavery."*

The God who gives the 10 Commandments is the same God who has set the people free from the slavery of Egypt by mighty deeds done through his servant, Moses:

10 plagues which forced Pharaoh to let the people go,  
the parting of the Red Sea to save the people when Pharaoh changed his mind  
and with murderous rage pursued these runaway slaves,  
the sending of manna from heaven as food in the desert,  
and the calling forth of water from the rock in order to quench the thirst of the people.

The 10 Commandments are given by a God who has shown great love for the people, who has not only freed them from slavery in Egypt but who also provides for their daily needs for food and drink in the desert.

On Mt. Sinai, this God whose love saves and sustains these runaway slaves, establishes a covenant with this people He has made his own, promising to be faithful to them, and giving them a way to remain faithful to him and each other through the gift of the Commandments.

Thus, the Catechism of the Catholic Church claims that the Commandments *“properly so called come in the second place: they express the implications of belonging to God through the establishment of the covenant. Moral existence is a response to the Lord’s loving initiative.”* (No. 2062)

By the gift of the 10 Commandments, the Lord God gives these runaway slaves a blueprint for a new civilization based on fidelity to God and fidelity to each other. They are based upon loving God (see the 1<sup>st</sup> three) and loving neighbor (see the last 7).

The Commandments, therefore, are only the beginning of a life in a response to the call to love God with all that we are and to love our neighbor.

They are not the be all and end all of a life of faith, but the foundation upon which a life in God and with God and with others can be built.

Since these 10 are given by the God who has freed them from slavery, they are meant to set the people free to love.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment reveals this desire of God to show His people how to live in freedom, and thus be free to love and be loved.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment---*“Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day”* commands the people to rest on the Sabbath.

For 6 days they are to labor, but the 7<sup>th</sup> day shall always be holy, set apart.

This commandment is a powerful reminder of the saving love of God for His people, because when they were slaves in Egypt they had to work every day---*that’s what slaves do.*

But now they have been saved by God from slavery and work can no longer be their life, By resting one day each week, they remember God’s saving deeds in Egypt and are able to rest more fully in the love of God who keeps on saving and sustaining their lives.

Remembering and resting are what we Christians do on the Sabbath day.

We come on this Sabbath day to recall the mighty deeds of God and to rest in His saving love.

We remember the saving deed of God, the death of His Son on the cross. For every time we eat this bread and drink this cup we proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes in glory.

We remember the Word of God became flesh in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary. We recall his words spoken to us....

When asked what the greatest commandment in the Law is, Jesus responds: *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”*

For it is tempting to think that the Christian life is only about keeping the 10 commandments and thus do the very least to simply get by, without ever growing in our relationship to God and to others. We could live a very safe and timid life and fulfill almost all the commandments by “not” breaking the Law, but we are invited to something much, much more. In our praying, we are called to daily make the Lord God the center of our lives. In our almsgiving, we are invited to see the Crucified Christ present in the least of our sisters and brothers suffering all around us. In our fasting, we are challenged to give up the grudges and resentments which paralyze our hearts.

We, who have been made temples of God, by the saving gift of the Spirit of God, come to the Lord Jesus this day, aware that the temples of our lives need cleansing.

Our minds and hearts need to be purified of simply going through the motions, doing the least we can do, when it comes to our relationship with the Lord.

We are called into a living, breathing, vibrant relationship with the Word made flesh, with the Son of God, who shows us by his words and deeds what fulfilling the Law of Love looks like.

The Lord Jesus comes to us in this saving Sacrament of the Eucharist to cleanse us of the usual way of doing business, to purify our lives so that can make the giver of the Law the center of our lives of faith, not the Law.

The invitation from God in Christ is into a life-changing, life-giving relationship, to rise up with Him to new life now. Into a relationship stronger than death....

*Fr. Joseph A. Jacobi*