

[Readings: Exodus 20:1-17; Psalm 19; 1 Cor 1:22-25; John 2:13-25]

Almost every one of us has gone through a time in our lives of rebellion – rebellion against parents, against teachers, against bosses, against popes and bishops, against rules and regulations, and rebellion against almost all authority.

Also in our lifetime, we have had people take the Ten Commandments apart, calling them irrelevant, outdated or just plain silly. But these Ten Commandments, the Great Commandment and the Beatitudes are the highway signs God has given us for our life's journey. Since we make this earthly journey only once, these signs save us personally, and the human family, a great deal of misery, harm and time. We have learned their value at great personal expense, usually by NOT following them and then suffering the painful consequences.

These Commandments can better be described as short instructions for life. As someone put the meaning of the letters of the word "Bible," they said, "Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth." They teach us what is necessary for living a truly full life. They are nothing more and nothing less than God's will for us human beings. That is why Psalm 95 says that "the commands of the Lord are true, and all of them just." They are true because they correspond to what we truly are. They are a shortcut to wisdom that we could not acquire on our own, by ourselves. To break any one of the Ten Commandments would be a sin, even mortal. It results in eternal death. Choose life and live; choose death and die.

The first three Commandments deal with our relationship with God. What are the "other gods" that we put in the place of the One True God? Wealth, fame, money, power, popularity, food, sex, alcohol or drugs? We may not see them as the real gods in our lives, but if we give such things more time, energy and money than are due God and His Church, we are on a very slippery slope!

And yet, St. John in today's Gospel tells us that despite His growing fame, "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" (Jn 2:24-25). He knew them all. He knew what human nature is capable of.

The Word made flesh, the splendor of the Father, knows every crack and crevice of the human heart. And He knows ours as well!

The Book of Exodus tells us to remember. And make no idols for yourself, nothing to lead you into forgetfulness. And yet, any reader of Exodus knows how quickly Israel turns to [idolatry](#). They make a golden calf from the very material that was to be used for the construction of a place for the worship of the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob.

Our baptism has not rescued us from the broken tendency of the human person to create idols.

The idol of consumption, of an unending desire to possess.

The idol of racism in which our hardness of heart causes us to hate our neighbor because of the color of their skin, rather than the content of their character.

The idol of putting too much trust in a political figure, making a fallen man into a false messiah who has come to redeem the people.

Like Israel, there is a way out of this idolatry. We must remember.

Remember what the Father has done through his Son, Jesus Christ.

“God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life” (Jn 3:16).

The other seven Commandments deal with interpersonal relationships. It is upon these values that a wholesome and holy society and culture are based: respect and reverence for family, for life, for marriage and fidelity, for home and for our property and the property of others. In a positive light, all Ten Commandments teach us how to treat God, how to treat others, and how to treat ourselves. Our task is to learn them clearly, and to live them out fully.

Remember, too, that God’s commands and instructions lead us to true freedom, not to slavery to the Law. Like children, especially teens, when there are clearly defined and explained limits and boundaries to behavior, we learn what is acceptable and what is not; what is moral and what is immoral. There is a real freedom in that, even though it doesn’t seem so at first glance.

How does our First Reading connect with today’s Gospel? Jesus

graphically and violently cleans out the temple. But He uses the words, “My Father’s House” – a term used 26 more times in the Gospel of John. When Jesus “cleans house,” He is cleaning the understanding of what it meant to do the Father’s will. “My Father’s House” is each one of us, temples of the Holy Spirit.

“My Father’s House” is a place where we have a holy encounter with God. “My Father’s House” is the living Body of Christ, the Church. And finally, it is the very Body of Jesus Christ Himself. That is why he says, “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.” Jesus did not need anyone to testify about His human nature, because Jesus Christ is True God and True Man.

The reason that Jesus has the power to know the human heart is because of who He is. Jesus comes from God; He remains one with God; He has the power to know us. But Jesus is also fully human. He is able to speak the language of humanity. He knows what it means to love, to want, to suffer, to lose, to fear, to hate, and to want to run away from it all.

Jesus understands what it means to be misunderstood; He has known denial, betrayal and rejection. He knows how it feels to be disappointed and abandoned by those He thought were His friends.

Jesus knows the pain of bending His will and surrendering His life to a suffering that none of us would have chosen for ourselves.

Paul’s listeners in Palestine and Greece call this kind of thinking a stumbling block and utter foolishness. But John puts this temple story at the beginning of His Gospel rather than near the end as the other three Gospels do, to prove a point. Something very new and very different is happening here. Something which calls for a new understanding of law and spirit and love and action. Lent challenges us to cast out the money changers who shortchange our time and attention, to drive out the useless, the meaningless and the destructive things that desecrate the sacred places within us where God chooses to dwell. Let us present ourselves today as wise, new dwelling places for God. AMEN!

***Archbishop Vigneron is asking all parishes to read this short statement of his at each Mass on the weekend of March 13/14 as the obligation to attend Sunday Mass returns for most Catholics:***

Quote: "Sunday Mass is an important part of the life of every Catholic. We have a grave obligation to attend Mass every Sunday and holy day of obligation unless we are prevented from doing so by a serious obstacle. During the past year, the COVID-19 pandemic has created an environment of significant instability that required relaxing the dispensation from this serious obligation for all Catholics in the Archdiocese of Detroit.

For the past 10 months our parishes have learned how to safely and reverently celebrate Mass for anyone who was able to come. Now, as cases of COVID are dropping and the rate of vaccination is increasing, it is time for more of us to return to Mass. The obligation to attend Sunday Mass has returned for most Catholics this weekend. There are still particular dispensations for those who remain at a higher risk of infection or illness, so it may be a while for some of our brothers and sisters to return.

As we welcome more people back to our churches, we want to keep in mind the need for all of us to be patient with and supportive of each other. As an act of charity toward others, it is important that we continue to maintain social distancing and wear face-coverings at indoor events – including Mass. Exceptions are made for small children but for adults, face coverings are required. Pastors and parish staffs have been asked to help the faithful as they come back to Mass by reminding them of these directives, so that all will feel safe as they join us for Mass and receive the Holy Eucharist.

We know that this can be a challenge for some people, but your cooperation and support is a great spiritual and practical help, opening the doors for more people to safely and reverently participate at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. To those of you returning today: Welcome back and let us prepare ourselves for the Mass." End Quote.

It's good to remember where we came from, and what we did during the journey from the past to the present. The Chronicler of today's First Reading summarizes all of salvation history – the events and the works of God in the human family from the

beginning of time to the end of the Jewish era.

And there are common themes that emerge. Sinfulness and darkness, redemption, hope. “Early and often,” as the First Reading suggests, we know where our actions are taking us. We know, for example, that violent means do not lead to peaceful ends. Yet we pursue them over and over, hoping the laws of human dynamics will change this time, just this once, just for us.

Early and often, we observe, anger does not make for a satisfying or successful lifestyle. Nor does surrender to addiction, greed, the blame game, or self-righteousness. Each time we exercise these life strategies, they fail us; yet we persist in them because they are familiar and well-worn grooves in the road. Early and often, we beg for God’s grace, God’s help, to deliver us.

St. Paul alludes to this in today’s Second Reading by speaking of any good that has come to us human beings as pure grace, pure gift. Even if and when we are knee-deep or neck-deep in sin and darkness, God continues to call us to turn away from our sins and return to the holy presence of God Himself.

In the Gospel conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus, it is once again dark. St. John uses the image of light and darkness often in his Gospel, and today’s reading is no exception. Nicodemus is an important man in town. He could have sent someone to ask the questions that Nicodemus bears in his heart. Instead, being wary of approaching Jesus in the daytime, Nicodemus waits until it is dark to draw near to this controversial and complex man.

Nicodemus had just asked Jesus how someone can be “born again.” How can you go back to being a baby and retreating inside your mother’s womb and then come out again? Jesus replies to Nicodemus, “If you keep taking my Word literally all the time, you will not understand.” Then Jesus says: “Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up.”

And because of that grumbling, God sends seraph serpents to bite them and kill some of them. It wasn’t until Moses fashioned a serpent on a stick and raised it up that those who were dead or dying were raised up and healed. The words “raise up,” used at least seven times in John’s Gospel, can also mean “glorified” or “exalted.”

That’s what will happen when Jesus suffers the humiliating and unbelievably

painful crucifixion on Good Friday. Because He was “glorified” and exalted” on that most Holy Cross, Jesus will be “raised up,” “glorified” and “exalted” in his Resurrection – in His rising from the dead.

Once upon a time, late in the afternoon, a teenager sneaks into a back pew of the church. He drops his backpack, unplugs his I-pod and stuffs his basketball behind the kneeler. He is sad and overwhelmed by living in that strange land between childhood and adulthood, trying to meet the expectations of teachers to be a scholar, his coaches to be a champion and his classmates to “be cool.” In the quiet, he prays: “Lord, it’s me...”

In another part of the church, an exhausted businessman sinks into a seat. It has been a horrible day. He had to let five people go in his small agency. He had no choice: business is drying up. He did everything he could to keep them on; he offered severance pay and extended benefits. Still, he feels like the worst person who ever lived. He prays, “God, help me keep it together.”

And in the front of the image of Mary, a woman prays her rosary. But her thoughts are elsewhere: another confrontation with her daughter, the illness of her mother, the growing distance between her and her husband. She cries quietly to the Mother of God: “Lord, I’m not sure I can go on.”

In what ways do you still prefer the darkness of sin and avoid the light of Christ?  
How has God’s love for you turned you away from your sins and toward virtue?

Like Nicodemus, we find ourselves coming to Jesus in the middle of our darkest nights, seeking hope and consolation, direction and comfort. In his questions and confusion, his fears and doubts, Nicodemus is welcomed by Jesus with understanding and compassion. God so loves us that, by His grace, He transforms our darkest nights into the morning light of hope. By His wisdom, He transfigures our Good Friday despair into Easter joy. By His compassion, He heals our broken spirits into hearts made whole. That’s worth rejoicing and celebrating! And worth wearing my “manly rose” vestments! AMEN!

[Readings: Jer 31:31-34; Psalm 51; Heb 5:7-9; John 12:20-33]

“We would like to see Jesus.”

How do YOU define prayer? Is it merely talking to God, or is it talking to God AND listening to God, and then reflecting on God’s word and work in our lives? According to the ancient Jewish rabbis, there were three kinds of prayer. The first level was simple prayer, made in silence. The second kind of prayer was called “crying out.” You can hear the prayer of crying out. You see it in the news videos from the Middle East recording a scene of violence and death. People waving their hands and crying out in grief, frustration and anger.

The third kind of prayer according to traditional Jews is simply, “tears.” This kind of prayer is open, holy, honest “venting” before God. That is why the so-called “Agony in the Garden” is so significant for Jesus. He moves from inner, silent prayer to crying out loud, to tears which come so fiercely from within him that they become drops of blood. Jesus knew how to pray! He prayed, He cried out in desperation. He cried tears of blood, utterly vulnerable before His Father.

Jesus, in our reading from the Hebrews, is the enfleshment of God. Get this – God not only exists “out there” in total “otherliness,” God chooses to take up residence in a human body, enduring everything we endure without committing a single sin. His relationship with the Father takes on a new depth as Jesus Christ in his humanity cries out to His Father when He is alone with Him in prayer on the hillside, on the mountain, on the Sea of Galilee, or even in someone’s home. His cries out loudly from the stress of tremendous tension or searing pain. He realizes that it is now “the hour” of the dramatic events that will lead to his agonizing and humiliating death. And to His Glorious Resurrection.

This is the ONLY time in the entire Gospel of John when Jesus says, “The hour HAS come.” Remember that prior to this, Jesus would say, “My hour has not yet come” or “This is not yet my hour.” What did Jesus mean? Next to the precious gifts of love and faith, *time* is another great and precious commodity. Is it the right *time* to say or do this? Is it the wrong *time*? Has *time* run out? How much *time* do we have left?

Jesus Christ was very much aware of time, and the proper time. St. John tells us in his Gospel that at the right precise moment, the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. He speaks of “my hour” and “not my hour.”

Time is understood in the Bible in two ways. The first way is to think of time as linear. The Greek word for this concept is *CHRONOS*. This is the linear measure of time. It has a beginning point, a line of actions and events, and an end-point, or an arrow indicating infinity. We get the word “chronology” from *chronos*. This is how we measure history, science and our individual lives.

The other way of understanding time is called *KAIROS*. This points to specific moments and events in history and in our individual lives. The time of our birth, marriage, ordination, graduation, promotion, death. These are important and key *KAIROS* moments in the chronology of life.

A former employee in my last parish and I had an agreement. She would stay on staff until it was the right time to retire. She created a “chronos” while she worked there, a chronology of many years of faithful and conscientious employment. But when she determined that it was time to retire, she approached me with tears in her eyes and said, “It is Kairos.” It’s time.

In John’s Gospel, Jesus uses the word *Kairos* often. At the wedding feast at Cana, Jesus says to His Blessed Mother, “My hour (*Kairos*) has not yet come.” Today He says, “The hour has come” for the Son of Man to be glorified. The word “glorified” in the New Testament, “*doxa*” means the very glory of God, God’s presence. How does that presence of God take place? As we will see, through the death of Jesus. And then through His Resurrection. And ours. There is one verse in today’s Gospel, which has caused confusion and misinterpretation: “Whoever loves their life loses it, and whoever hates their life in this world will preserve it for eternal life.” Does this mean that we should hate our earthly life? When I was in high school and suffering the trials of being a teenager, I said in despair to my mom: “I hate my life. I didn’t ask to be born!” And she wisely replied, “Neither did I. Welcome to the club!”

We are here because God’s love willed us into existence. We are not called to hate our earthly life, but to put it into proper perspective, with our eyes



focused on Jesus and on eternal life. If we love our earthly life, we know that we are to “lose” it, to offer or sacrifice it as a gift in the Lord’s service. If we love our earthly life in a selfish way, we just lose whatever we think we have.

Discernment is a sophisticated skill, one that needs to be developed over time through practice. And we can develop this key moral capacity in a number of ways: to listen to our own hearts; to recognize that God’s ways are loving ways; to expect an answer, however subtle, when we turn to God; to learn that answers don’t always come in obvious ways; to consult with people we know to be wise; and to foster a sense of trust that if we have a sincere heart, we will find our way.

In just a few short years, the Greeks would have no need of Philip or Andrew to bring them to Jesus: Jesus was coming to them in the Gospel of Saint Paul, Barnabas, Silas, and others. The movement of the Gospel would be forward and outward, beyond Jerusalem and Judea, beyond Judaism and the synagogue itself. Christianity would become not merely a sect within the Jewish community, but another religion entirely. But Christianity would also remain an interior reality, not only expressed simply in exterior rituals, but in an indwelling Spirit who would remind us of Jeremiah’s new covenant written on hearts. The God within would require no mediation or explanation to those who accept Christ’s life within them.

To underscore this, Jesus becomes troubled. He cries out to God, Who answers, “I have glorified My Name and I will glorify it!”

How is YOUR prayer life? How do YOU stand in your covenant relationship with God? Have YOU prayed silently, cried out and wept in prayer? Has YOUR “kairos” moment arrived? There are only two more weeks left of this Lent for this year. Is it “time” for you to “hate your life in this world?” Not to wish that you had never been born, but to realize that you were born for a reason, for an amazing and awesome calling and mission? To die in order to rise? AMEN!

Readings: Isaiah 50:4-7; Psalm 22; Phil. 2:6-11; Mark 14:1-15:47]

For regular Mass-goers, familiarity is both gift and curse. Our bodies know what to do in the Eucharistic liturgy, how to genuflect and kneel and to proclaim the creed and when to pray the Our Father. We do not need to reflect on what we are doing but possess an unconscious competence for the liturgical act.

The shadow side of this liturgical competency is over-familiarity. We have heard these Scriptures before; we have celebrated this feast last year and the one before. What more is there for me to hear?

Of course, the regular Mass-goer would never utter these sentences aloud. We simply grow accustomed, maybe even bored of the yearly feasts of the Church.

Palm Sunday seeks to shake us out of this overly familiar posture toward the central mystery of salvation.

As the death of Christ is proclaimed, as we hear that Our Lord gives up his very last breath to the Father, we kneel in silence.

This is not the normal relationship we possess relative to our texts or images. The reading of the evening news communicates information, perhaps eliciting certain feelings in us. But we are not participants in the act. We are observers, watchers and, for the most part, outsiders to the events being covered.

Not so with the passion of Our Lord. We hear, "Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last" (Mk 15:37). And then we kneel.

How often we say perhaps without thought that Jesus suffered and died and rose again. The events are so familiar to us that we can forget the wondrous beauty that unfolds upon that cross.

Jesus Christ, fully God and fully human, takes upon himself the darkness of human sin and death. The crowds that first fete him as he enters Jerusalem, no longer sing hymns of praise but demand that he dies. They reject him, just like the prophets were rejected.

Except he is no ordinary prophet, no run-of-the-mill Isaiah or Jeremiah. He is the God-man, the Word made flesh, the splendor of the Father.

And he breathes his last.

Earlier in Mark, Jesus told us that all this was going to happen. Peter had confidently professed Jesus as the Messiah, the Christ, the great anointed one and king. Salvation had arrived, for at least, there would be a powerful king.

And now, we reach the point where Christ exercises the fullness of his kingship. He breathes his last, offering his spirit up to the Father. The suffering he endured was out of love for men and women, for his Father who sent him into the world.

As we hear in the Philippians' hymn on this Passion Sunday, Jesus did not claim equality with God to be grasped at. He is not like Adam or Eve or David and Solomon. He is not like Peter and James and John. He empties himself, gives himself, reveals to us upon that tree what it means to be God.

Not to seize power, to control everything. But to give oneself up in love for the life of the world. There's the power, the mystery that turns the world upside down.

So, let us bend the knee, as Our Lord breathes his last. Let us not remain spectators to the drama unfolding before us. God is revealing to us that power is made perfect in weakness, in a love that does not seize or grasp but gives unto the end.

Bend the knee before the mystery of love. Kneel before the wood of the cross upon which is hung our salvation.

Come, let us adore.