

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Lent  
March 7, 2021  
“Self or God?”

Ex 20:1-17  
1 Cor 1:22-25  
Jn 2:13-25

My Brothers and Sisters in the Lord –

Most of us bend the rules at sometime or another in our lives. For most of us, it can be something relatively small. We do so because it seems more convenient and less of a hassle to do something we think no one will discover or know about.

Thus, we don't come to a full stop at a stop sign – We drive over the speed limit – We take an extra bird or fish than the “regs” allow when hunting or fishing. We shun the homeless and believe they are their own or someone else's problem. Perhaps, many of us have done far worse than just these things!

In other words, in being this way, we try to live life on our own terms. We don't think of the potential consequences – or the harm – to others or to ourselves. We don't consider the fact that things can go terribly wrong – or what could happen if everyone lived in this way!

Unfortunately, far too many people want to practice religion on their own terms as well. They choose a religion that accommodates them or their lifestyle. They keep those observances that are convenient. They disregard certain commandments or rationalize behavior that breaks other commandments. Perhaps, worst of all, is that they keep the letter of the Commandments, but close themselves off to all that the Gospel demands. They refuse to see the relationship of the Gospel to the Commandments. And they justify themselves by not getting caught or arrested. However, Father Jim Nesbet once remarked, here, long ago, that the authentic Christian is expected to do much more than barely stay out of jail!

In the passage from Exodus, God gives the 10 Commandments to the Chosen People. Some of the 10 Commandments are very straight forward. But some of them are further nuanced to be sure that the people understood how they applied!

Not only was the worship of another god forbidden, but so was having images of those deities likewise forbidden. God did not even allow any image of Himself, since He is beyond imagination or comprehension altogether!

In the Gospel of St. John, Jesus drives out the money changers and the sellers of sacrificial animals from the temple precincts. Everything that was going on in that outer court was wrong! Besides the complete lack of reverence, the religious leaders profited by renting out the space. The money changers cheated the people trying to buy the unblemished animals required for sacrifice.

When confronted by the religious authorities and asked for a sign, Jesus predicted his own Resurrection in symbolic terms. “Destroy this temple – and in three days, I will raise it up!”

The Jewish religious leadership had accommodated their religion to suit themselves and to justify themselves. But they couldn't accept Jesus because he didn't fit into their paradigm. Even many of the people who followed Jesus did so because of the signs and wonderful cures he worked. These signs and wonders were helps to a faith in Jesus, that they could not explain or fully understand. Hence, they would easily fall away.

Nevertheless, Jesus knew their hearts – their very fickle humanness. Moreover, unless they learned a deep faith and had a faith-relationship with him, they would not follow him to the cross. They would never accept the cross in their own lives when it was a condition of following him!

St. Paul more than understood all this when he wrote to the Corinthians. In the first chapter of his Letter, he tells them, and us, that faith in Jesus and adherence to his Gospel demand everything in our hearts and souls. The Jews want signs – and the only sign they are given is the stumbling block of the cross. It is always a stumbling block if we refuse it – or don't lift it and carry it willingly.

The Greeks, the so-called “wise of the world”, look for wisdom. They cannot accept the foolishness of the cross. The wisdom they embrace is the wisdom of the world. Today, it is the wisdom of profit, of the bottom line – the wisdom of getting ahead – the wisdom of the culture, of the secular media, and of political correctness – the wisdom of compromise – and the wisdom of lying, subterfuge, and self-centeredness!

Brothers and Sisters, instead, we are called to the power of God and to the wisdom of God. It is the power of God that will raise us up as He raised up Jesus. We are also called to the wisdom of God that always keeps our Creator first – a divine foolishness that never makes idols of technology, our work or career, our money or our possessions. It is the wisdom of the Gospel that always keeps God at our center. It relates everything in our life to God in praise and thanksgiving – And we do so, especially, for the dignity, the Gospel, and the divine call we have been given! So, let us pray, today, that we grow in this wisdom and power during this Lent and throughout the rest of our life!

Amen.

March 7, 2021

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