

Bible Study

Third Sunday of Lent, cycle B

Opening Prayer: (Sign of the Cross) “Holy God, when we were baptized, you entered into a holy covenant with each of us. We became your adopted sons and daughters; you will be our only God. Open our ears once again to hear your words of love, our hearts to receive them, and our wills to put them into practice daily. We ask this in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.”

Focusing Question:

1. What have you observed or learned from your Lenten disciplines up to this point of Lent?
2. Which of the commandments do you find the easiest to obey consistently? The hardest?

Commentary before the First Reading: Exodus 20:1-17

The Natural Law consists of those things that one can know as right or wrong without even knowing God. The 10 Commandments (in Hebrew, “the 10 Words”) were based in large part on the Natural Law. The last 7 commandments already existed in some form in Hebrew tribal law and in non-Jewish tribes, even before God established the covenant through Moses. They are based on the truth that some actions promote community and some actions are harmful to community. God added a new dimension when he gave the law; the first 3 commandments reveal the conviction that relationship with God is primary to and affects all other relationships.

Read the First Reading aloud.

1. State the Natural Law that corresponds to each of the last 7 commandments (such as, #4 “Respect elders.”)
2. Which is the only commandment with a promise for keeping it?
3. Why do you think God used more words for the first 3 commandments than all the others combined?
4. How did God prove to the Hebrew people that He had real power, whereas false gods do not? (see verse 1)
5. What does it mean that God is a “jealous God”?
6. How does one take the name of the Lord in vain?
7. What makes the Sabbath day – the Lord’s Day – holy, by its very nature? (see verse 11)
8. State each of the commandments in a positive manner (“you shall ...” instead of “you shall not...”)?

Commentary before the Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:22-25

Although all the Gospels were written after Saint Paul wrote this letter, he demonstrates a well-thought-out and profound theology of the cross. To Jews and to non-Jews alike, the cross was a horrible reminder of Roman cruelty, an instrument of torture and death, an ugly symbol of shame. Only a Christian, because of the gift of faith, could see the cross as a sign of love and victory.

Read the Second Reading aloud, perhaps beginning already with verse 18.

1. What is the only way, according to Saint Paul, that any person could see Jesus’ crucifixion as good, as something to be happy about? In other words, who or what makes such a view possible? (see verse 24)
2. What does this image of a broken, murdered, dead man (the crucifix) mean to you personally?
3. During Lent, the Second Reading is supposed to connect the First Reading with the Gospel. Looking again at the Commandments, point out which aspects of various commandments would be foolishness to a non-believer. Which ones would seem to be a sign of weakness, when in fact they require great strength?

Commentary before the Gospel Reading: John 2:13-25

For the next 3 weeks of Lent we will read from Saint John’s Gospel instead of from Saint Mark’s. In this reading John’s reference to the imminent destruction of the temple is interesting because he wrote just 20 years after the temple in Jerusalem had actually been destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD. Saint John was able to use that historical event to emphasize the connection between Church and the former center of worship for the Jewish people. The crucified and resurrected Body of Christ, rather than the temple, is now the proper focus for worship of the one, true God.

Read the Gospel Reading aloud.

1. Which words or phrases caught your attention in this reading?
2. What was happening at the temple that violated the relationship God wants to have with His people?

3. Which commandment was being broken?
4. If Jesus was “like us in all things except sin,” how can we justify his violent, angry outburst in this story?
5. Which statement by Jesus makes perfect sense to us now, but would have been nonsense to the Jewish leaders at that time?
6. The Jewish leaders asked for a sign that would prove Jesus had divine authority. When those kinds of signs no longer happened, what happened to those whose faith was based only on seeing miracles?
7. Did Jesus work any miracles, “signs,” while in Jerusalem that week?

Applying the Readings to our Daily Lives

1. We often interpret the commandments with a broader meaning than their literal statement: for example, honor all people of authority rather than just parents. Can you give examples of other commandments whose understanding has been broadened to include sins other than those specifically named?
2. What basis is there for that broader interpretation?
3. What is the difference between a carved idol and a statue representing Jesus, who is God?
4. How do you “keep holy the Sabbath day”? Show how this commandment means more than just going to church. Identify ways that our society frequently violates this commandment and thinks nothing of it.
5. In recent years the Commandments have sparked considerable debate about the separation of Church and state. In your opinion, what role should the 10 Commandments have in public life and law? Are they even practical in 21st century life?
6. In the Gospel Jesus seems to maintain that one’s behavior must match the way one prays. Does it really make any difference how we pray, as long as we follow the laws?

Closing Prayer

God of compassion, out of love for your people you gave them commandments that would guide their lives, keep them close to you, and bear the fruit of happiness. We cannot deny our sinfulness; we feel its burden every day. When our weakness causes discouragement, let your compassion fill us with hope and lead us through a Lent of repentance to the beauty of Easter joy. Grant this through Christ our Lord. Amen. (Sign of the Cross)