

6th Sun. OT

Lent begins in a week and a half. Ash Wednesday Masses will be at 8:00am and 6:00pm. Check out the parish website if you're interested in the book study I'll be leading during Lent. And finally, next Saturday is the Classic Movie Night. I suggest bringing a lawn chair if you come.

+The older I get the more I see the wisdom behind the rules my parents set for me and my siblings when we were growing up. And I appreciate them having enforced them, because I see more clearly now they were motivated by love. Everything God does and communicates to us is motivated by love as well. This is certainly true of His commandments and everything he requires of us through the teachings of the Catholic Church which we're obliged to follow.

Our first reading from Sirach is part of the Wisdom literature in Scripture, talking here specifically about the importance of refraining from sin. It's an exhortation against offending the Lord. "If you choose you can keep the commandments, they will save you." Despite our doubting this in the moment of temptation, following the law of God is not only in our best interest....it's a necessity for preserving our life. The consequences of sin contribute to a messy, painful, and miserable life. What God tells us to do and what not to do is for our well-being, He instructs us because He loves us. But at the end of the day, it's up to us to choose. "If you choose, you can keep the commandments." It's as simple as, if you choose, you can live.

I can't help but think that similar to me appreciating the rules of my childhood only after I grew up, it'll be at the end of my life, and God willing in Heaven, that I fully appreciate the laws and teachings of God on earth. Jesus forces us today to take a deeper look at some of these commandments and teachings, making it much harder for us to quickly pass over them, assuming we're innocent of sin because we haven't killed someone. But we can't forget, as our Lord is offering more detailed and explicit commandments he's revealing a greater concern and love for us.

“You have heard...*you shall not kill*...but I say to you, whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgement; and whoever says to his brother *raqa*, will be answerable to the Sanhedrin. Jesus is not forbidding the emotion of anger, we don't have complete control over what emotions we feel. But he is forbidding our consenting to that anger when it comes. By giving in or engaging the emotion of anger, that's what leads to sinful actions or insults. *Raqa* was an Aramaic word, used as an insult. It meant empty headed or worthless. Why is this such a serious sin? Well, consider how much Christ values the person in front of you that he died for that person...and you then go and call him worthless. If I insult what is loved by God, calling him or her worthless...I'm inadvertently insulting and calling God worthless.

Jesus also condemns calling a person a 'fool.' That's a translation of a Greek word, *more*, which is where we get the word moron. Similar to *raqa*, to call and label someone as a fool, is to dismiss them....to write them off as inconsequential. It's the attitude that, the world would be better off without you. At first we might think, I don't ever do that. Oh but we do, especially politically these days. If someone is on the other side of an issue, holding a different opinion than me, I somehow feel justified in writing them off, dismissing them as worthless...equating them as a person with the issue we disagree on.

It's when we look at the commandments on these deeper levels that we realize I'm not nearly as innocent or sinless as I first thought. It's not enough to take account of just my actions, but the attitude and spirit of my heart must also be examined. If we do this, it becomes very clear how necessary it is that I frequent the sacrament of Confession, especially before receiving Holy Communion.

I know a woman who had not been a practicing Catholic for many years, she went to a different church. She recently started attending Mass again, which she hadn't been to in about 50

years. We were talking and she was telling me about some of the changes she observed, from what she saw in the early 70's. She was surprised at how many people at Mass went up for Communion. And she figured I must have been hearing confessions for a long time the day prior. Because not that long ago, it was customary to go to confession a day or so before one planned on receiving Communion.

This was strongly encouraged and was the custom because as I our Lord says in today's Gospel, one should not approach the altar of God, let alone receive Him in the Eucharist, if one is not in right relationship with one's neighbor or with God. It is a contradiction, even a sacrilege, to receive Holy Communion if you have committed grave sins or failed to obey all the Church teachings without first receiving the sacrament of Confession. In the last 50 years the Church has emphasized the importance of frequent Communion but has failed to emphasize the importance of frequent Confession...especially when one has disobeyed a Church teaching.

It's tragic enough when we commit a sin, when we don't follow Church teaching, but it's only made worse when a person doesn't abstain from Holy Communion if they haven't gone to Confession. But we shouldn't behave like a child who doesn't appreciate why their parents have certain rules. As Psalm 19 says, "The law of the Lord is trustworthy, refreshing the soul. The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart." It should be enough that we trust that they're there because God truly cares. The commandments are given to us for no other reason than that God loves us...certainly no less than a parent loves their own children.