

Sunday March 7th, 2021

Third Sunday of Lent Parishioner Reflection

By: Paul Legace

On this 3rd Sunday of Lent the readings offer us an opportunity to reflect upon the teachings of our faith and how they influence our own beliefs, our intentions and ultimately our actions. We are presented with three powerful readings: the Ten Commandments from the Book of Exodus, St. Paul's 1st letter to the Christian community in Corinth and the Gospel story of Jesus driving the money changers from the Temple in Jerusalem. All of these can assist us in reflecting upon where we seek wisdom today and how that prudence informs our beliefs and actions.

The Ten Commandments are the foundational teachings that Jews and Christians adhere to when they think about their relationship with God and each other. These commandments should influence our morals and be a guide for our daily actions. The first commandment states I am the Lord thy God and thou shalt have no gods before me. How many of us are led a stray in the pursuit of obtaining wealth, fame, sex and a myriad of material goods? For many these are their ultimate goals in life. The third commandment calls us to not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain. Our modern world has little or no reverence for the name of Jesus Christ and it is used in a derogatory manner by actors, comedians, and many adults. It's no wonder our young people curse the name of our Savior with not even a second thought when they hear it said on video games, movies and social media ubiquitously. What is a Christian parent to do? Make a stand in your home. In this home we (parents and children) speak with reverence when using the name of God. It's unacceptable to speak otherwise.

Honour thy father and thy mother is the fifth commandment. I commend those who make the sacrifices to care for their mothers and fathers as they age and become more dependent on their children for their basic needs. Many of us will have to decide how to deal with the declining health of our parents. It's a very arduous decision to place one's mother or father in a long term care (LTC) residence. Sometimes the challenges are too great to handle at home and the adult children decide out of love to place them in an LCT facility. Our society as a whole though neglects the elderly, shuts them away and denies them in many ways the love and care they desperately need. This pandemic has laid bare the fact we as Canadians don't value our senior population. Roughly eighty percent of the COVID-19 deaths have come in long term care homes in Ontario. Personal Support Workers (PSWs) aren't paid a living wage and have been forced to work at two or three senior homes to make ends meet. It's evident we don't value the essential work they do with the elderly. There are in some instances as many as three or four or more seniors in a single room with one bathroom. Is this a humane model of

care when influenza and other diseases breakout in senior residences on an annual basis?

These commandments offer us much guidance for Christian living. Jesus sums up the importance of these commandments when he declares to one of his followers which is the greatest commandment, Jesus said, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second resembles it: You must love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22: 37-39) Known as the "Great Commandment" it is the foundation of a Christian life, a life built on love.

In the second reading St. Paul counsels the Christian community in Corinth in the first century. He tells them that the message about the Cross is foolishness to non-believers but for us Christians it has great power, the power to save from a loving God. God became flesh in the person of Jesus. Jesus is fully human and fully divine. God redeems humanity through Jesus. Jesus died for our sins and we have the opportunity for eternal life if we follow his teachings. In the publication entitled Sacred Journey Reflections, St. Paul's message is described in another enlightening way. When we are comfortable the foolishness of the Cross is for other people, but when we enter upon the mystery of the Cross than we encounter boundless love. St Paul states Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Where do many today turn for wisdom? Where are our values centred upon? Are we in pursuit of the largest home or most expensive car? Do social media and the media in general promote expectations that conflict with our Christian beliefs? Do our employers have expectations that run counter to our Christian teachings? How does one keep the Sabbath holy if one is focused on work or sports no matter what the day of the week? If we focus on our earthly pursuits are we able to grow in love for God and one another?

The Gospel comes from John 2. 13-25. Jesus visits the Temple in Jerusalem with the Passover approaching. He witnesses people selling cattle, sheep and doves along with individuals exchanging Greek and Roman money for Jewish shekels. Jesus is angered by their lack of respect for his Father's home and drives them out by using a whip. He declares, "Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" He later tells the Jews present that if they destroy this temple I'll raise it up in three days. Jesus was not speaking about the physical temple he was in but his own body. What message does this Gospel story have for us in 2021? Are we living the way God wants us to live? Are we centring our lives on God and loving our neighbour as ourselves? One could ask who is my neighbour? During these pandemic times many are feeling isolated and in need of human contact. Even though we can't meet physically perhaps a letter, a phone call or a face time to an elderly relative or friend can brighten their day and ease the pain of their loneliness. There are many who are marginalized in our society today. How can I reach out to the homeless, the imprisoned, groups who are discriminated against because of their sexual orientation, race or disability?

During this time of Lent are we taking the time to examine our own relationship with God so to grow in the right relationship with God? Prayer is the means by which we can begin to strengthen that relationship. Are we taking some time from our busy lives to speak to God and ask for wisdom and strength to deal with the problems we are confronted with in our lives? There are many means of prayer and perhaps we need the encouragement to try another method if our regular practice isn't allowing us to communicate in a meaningful way. Almsgiving and fasting are guided by our prayers and these traditional Lenten practices can assist us in improving our relationship with God. The psalm this week declares that the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eyes.

Jesus declares in the Gospel that sin and death will not have the final say in our lives but his victory over both will be his testament, his gift to all of us. Lent is a time to confront our own wilderness. Are we prepared to reach out to God for wisdom, courage and strength to help navigate these troubled waters? Jesus has shown us the way to the Father. Will we make time to be still and listen? Do we have the courage to change our patterns of behavior and act upon the Lord's wisdom? Lent is a great opportunity to challenge us to refocus our purpose in life.