

The Third Sunday of Lent – March 3-4, 2018

Last Sunday in the Gospel story of the transfiguration of Jesus, we were given a glimpse not only of the divinity of Jesus hidden within his humanity, but also a glimpse of our own holiness and dignity that was gifted to us in our baptism.

We are called live in holiness, but injured and blinded by sin, we need help and redemption from God.

The catechism of the Church says that “Divine help comes to humanity in Christ through the law that guides him and the grace that sustains him.” #1949

Today in the first reading we hear through Moses about the Law God gave to the Israelites to show them and us how to be in right relationship to God and to each other.

Moses is given two stone tablets upon which God has written a plan for life – loving God and neighbor. These commandments were given to the Israelites as a means to free them from the past and to provide a clear path for the future and for the eternal life that God created humanity to share.

The Ten Commandments are the most basic rules of conduct given to us by God for our good and the common good.

However, these written rules flow from an even deeper natural law that is written in the soul of every person -- an original moral sense which enables all to discern through reason what is good and what is evil, what is true and what is a lie.

In the heart – every person knows that certain things are always wrong – for eg. – stealing, taking the life of another, dishonesty, misuse of our sexuality, not giving priority to God, etc. This is accessible to all who have reason.

However, when God chose Israel to be his people, he revealed and summed up this inner law in the Ten Commandments to make clear his expectations of them. In other words – God gave them a “hard copy” of his expectations of them.

St. Augustine says – “God wrote on the tablets of the Law what men did not read in their hearts.”

The giving of the Old Law was the beginning of a long process of God revealing his will to humanity that leads to the New Law or Gospel revealed to us by Jesus.

The Law of the Gospel fulfills, surpasses and leads the Old to its perfection. As Jesus said, “I have come not to abolish the Law but to fulfill it.” We see this fulfillment expressed in the Sermon on the Mount and in the Beatitudes which address the purification of our hearts and inner life and not just external actions. They orient us not to some reward on earth but to the goal of heaven. For example, “Blessed are the poor in Spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

They call us to a new holiness and perfection of life in imitation of God Himself – to love and forgiveness even of our enemies and to generosity equal to what God has shown to us. The ultimate summary of the New Law is Jesus’ call to “love one another as I have love you.”

This progressive revelation of the way of life God wants us to follow and gives to us to guide us to the fullness of life, reveals for us our spiritual journey, i.e., gradually growing in likeness to God and in the fullness of life we see in Jesus.

Today’s second reading and today’s Gospel speak to us about the struggles we as humans have on this journey to be more and more like God in our way of life.

In journeying to the future we all find hope in different things. Paul noted that the Jews looked for signs of God’s will written in the Old Law

and prophets. For them that seemed the safest route to the future. The Greeks preferred to look to wisdom as expressed by people of wisdom as the surest way to the future. In today's reading, Paul advises Christians coming from both Jewish and Greek backgrounds to consider that Jesus offers both securities. As a divine sign and wise teacher, Jesus is the one to follow into a future of hope that will not disappoint even though his way may look foolish to us in the present moment. The cross may seem foolish but it is the highest and fullest expression of God's love and mercy for us.

What is happening in the Gospel is also a reminder that like the Israelites who in essence knew the proper way of God but did not follow it, we can find ourselves in the same predicament.

Jesus in the gospel shows us again the proper path. The money-changing and selling of animals for sacrifice was actually a legitimate service to the people coming to the temple, however, what saddens and angers Jesus is that this same merchandising has caused the worship of God to be degenerated into seeing God as one to be bribed or appeased by the right kind of donation or sacrifice instead of a true love and gratitude for God and trust in God.

Jesus is outraged in the Gospel that his Father's house is being used as a trading center. A lot of money was being made for the temple and some of it was through gouging the pilgrims who came there to worship. As the gospel writer notes, at the end of the gospel -- Jesus was well aware of the intentions and motivations in their hearts. They may have thought they were fooling God, but they weren't. So empty and meaningless has their worship become that God will establish a new "temple" in the resurrected body of Jesus.

Jesus, in the gospel, restores the temple to a truly prayerful state. What about our own

relationship to God and others? Does it also need some spring cleaning?

Lent is the perfect time to look at where we stand in our relationship with God. We know the law of God. We know what is right and what we should do. Yet, too often our personal desires or pressures of the world cause us to go astray. Often the world today sees God' law as rather foolish and possibly not applicable to our new day and age. Have we been affected by such ideas?

Do we need to renew in our hearts and minds how blessed we are that now in Christ we all are the new holy temple of God's presence in the world and how blessed we are that through the gift of the Holy Spirit within us we have the way and the power to live in truly new and holy ways?

Let us think of new and fulfilling ways that we are called to live in Christ.

The Old Law was good, but all is fulfilled in the New Law of Christ. For example, in the Old Law we were called to tithe our gifts to God. Now in Christ we are invited to give all to God. Remember St. Francis of Assisi who sold off all his possessions so as to be totally dependent and committed to Christ. Remember Jesus' words to the rich young man who came to him – he told him to sell all and come after him. In the parables of the kingdom, persons sold all they had to buy the precious pearl or the field that contained the treasure. Jesus himself sacrificed everything of himself on the cross for our sake.

What Jesus found in the Temple in today's gospel was that faith and devotion to God had collapsed into compromises with convenience and worldly ways. His actions proclaim that conventional or mediocre religion is not enough. This is not the way shown to us in Jesus. Faith is not a matter of convenience. We must be in love with God. We must be passionate about our

worship and prayer. We must live the covenant with God fully. Jesus himself shows us how to be passionate. His zeal and love leads him to the cross. May we follow him, and our Lenten journey lead us to realize the holiness and joy that is in us, and is God's call and plan revealed for us in Jesus.