

OUR LADY STAR OF THE SEA WEYMOUTH
HOMILY FOR THE THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT (B)
11TH MARCH 2012

As Father Stephen said last week we are learning more about our faith during Lent, and my task was to share some insights with you about the Commandments, which by good fortune happens to be the first reading today.

Many of us forget that the commandments are a covenant. This is important – So many people complain that the Old Testament is about an angry judgemental God. But the covenant shows the primary ethical concept of the Old Testament is relational, not law! (Bull)..... A covenant is an unbreakable agreement between 2 parties – but not equals. One is always greater, has the power. In this covenant God is being magnanimous to us. Children, ask your parents what that means. God, so much greater than us, invites us to enter a deep relationship with him, where he is the one giving more.

Now, Jesus did say to the rich man “If you wish to enter eternal life, keep the commandments”, so we do need to know them. (Mk 10.17; Matt 19.16) I’ve some good news, and some bad news. The bad news is, as you are aware, there are Ten of them!

But the good news is Jesus summed them up for us (Mk 12.28; Matt 22.36) when he answered the question about which is the greatest commandment. There are 2 parts to his answer.

Firstly: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, with all your mind and all your strength”.

.....We are so blessed; we are sons and daughters of God. And if we really recognised in our hearts how much God loves us, wants us to love him, how differently we might live.

As his children he is our father and the first 3 commandments are directed to him. Put simply, don’t worship pop idols, money, sex, or cars as number one in our lives; show respect and don’t use his name in vain. And as we are doing now, it’s great to see so many here who have come to church and don’t simply use Sunday as a catch up day.

In general terms the other 7 commandments are focused on our communities and how we treat each other. They fit into the second part of Jesus’ answer to the greatest commandment, which is “Love your neighbour as yourself.”

To explore that, does anyone here enjoy group activities, such as football or card games like bridge? When played well, with good rules, everyone has lots of fun. But if some players twist the rules, if they change some things just to suit themselves – maybe one team decides they can trip up their opponents – it becomes a mess, no-one really enjoys themselves and it can all fall

apart. Quite simply, like football or cards, when we break the rules of the game of life, life becomes a mess....things go wrong and lives can fall apart.

St Augustine sums it up brilliantly: “Love God and do what you like” versus the modern “Do what you like, then see a psychoanalyst to find out why you don’t like anything”.

God gives us the commandments as a gift, so that our lives are good. Let’s face it; he made the world so he knows how it will work best. The problem is: we don’t follow his instructions.

However, the instructions can only help if we know them. In 2001, a survey of 12,000 people between ages 18-35, the majority could only quote 3 out of 10 commandments! So we must teach our children, and indeed our friends what they are. Let’s go back to the group activities. Many of you know I’m a rugby fan – well, we wouldn’t send our friends who knew nothing about rugby to play in a match. Not only will they be frustrated but if they don’t know the rules they would get hurt. Well, let’s not let our family or friends get unnecessarily hurt in the game of life.

Some people say that the 10 commandments are really only suggestions. They are wrong. Remember, we are made in God’s image. So it should be no surprise that these commandments are in fact stamped onto our very souls, they are part of are makeup.

Deep down, we all have a sense of right and wrong.

All the same, our consciences need guidance to make sure our sense of right and wrong is correct. Our conscience can be influenced by what is around us, what we read or see on TV. We risk making up we our own rules, but ones that are twisted, like being allowed to trip up the opponent in football.

So we have seen how following good rules makes sense. We know God loves us, but it can feel hard to “Love our neighbour as our self”.

As encouragement here’s a lovely story about a thief who was listening outside one of the evangelist Billy Graham’s conferences at Wembley. He had gone there to pick pocket people but was struck in his heart as he overheard Billy preaching about the commandments.....He was so overcome that he went into the nearest church, where on the wall he saw the list of the commandments. Rather than seeing them as restrictions on his life, he stood in that church singing aloud with joy since he understood what Jesus had meant when he said “I haven’t come to abolish the Law, but to fulfil it”. The thief read them as promises. He was able to say “Because I love you, I won’t kill you; cheat on you; steal from you; lie to you; or be jealous of you.”

And let us a quick look at that last command about coveting, about not being jealous. If in fact we are grateful for what we have (that attitude of gratitude) we don’t continually want more. If we aren’t jealous of friends’ clothes, iPods, mobile phones.....everyone is more content. Yet again, God’s rules rather than controlling us free us to be happy.

We know that it's hard work to change our attitudes, but we need to learn not to be jealous of others; not to want what they have. God has already blessed us with so much. Consider football or cards again. If we want to be good at it, able to play the whole competition we have to train. Lent offers a special time to focus on controlling ourselves – it's like training our minds ready for the game of life.

To conclude – God offers a covenant, not just rules. He gives his love freely as the strong partner in our relationship. Respond to this gift, live life in Christ. Then we will find we develop a good conscience, we won't, so to speak, need the rules to play the game of life as we will find that we love God, and we will love our neighbour as ourselves.

On each bench there is a small gift, with words that show what the commandments can mean when we have life in Christ. I think when we read them, we will know the truth of them in our hearts.

Rev Jonathan de Kretser