

The weekly excursion to the grocery store is always kind of interesting—especially on weekends. One sees the elderly going about methodically, quietly minding their business. The middle-aged without kids usually somewhat more hurried. That parent with older kids—or teens by themselves—even more rushed and more harried, the kids in various stages of boredom and courtesy (is it that hard to say “Excuse me” ... you young whippersnappers!!) And, of course, the range of young parents with little kids—quiet kids, bored kids, grabby kids, screamers ... frazzled parents showing their “herding cats” frustration—the whole gamut of munchkin behavior.

Oh, wouldn't it be nice if progeny popped out fully formed (somewhat difficult birthing in such case, I'd expect). Why couldn't humans have just maintained the cell-division-type reproduction and just “bloop” over a copy of ourselves, and skip this maturing and development annoyance!?

And yet ... do not many of the joys and reward of rearing children come in overcoming trials and tribulations of guiding the maturing child to adulthood, and the satisfaction of watching them grow? And, as they continue through adulthood, the now aging parent witnesses further growth, and has ever greater joy as “the kids” become helpers, caretakers, closest friends and confidants ... until the parents themselves go on to their eternal reward, and those children find themselves the patriarchs/matriarchs of families—those to whom are looked to for example and direction ... the baton of family leadership having been handed off, and which they themselves will hand off in a few short years.

Relatedly, it has been rather a banner weekend as far as Catholic Mass readings go (6-7 March) ... readings which also reflect growth of maturity, but of religion and, subsequently, society. Saturday's Gospel was the much-beloved story of the Prodigal Son of Luke 15—likely Jesus' best known parable—and Sunday's Old Testament reading was of God's giving the Ten Commandments to the Israelites in the book of Exodus—the foundation of all Jewish (and Christian) religious and moral law.

The Commandments are often portrayed—even ridiculed—in our day almost as arbitrary strictures—musty old rules out of touch with the modern world, and as limiting autocratic “Thou Shalt Not!” prohibitions. But when we consider them even today, are they not simply basic principles of both worship and harmonious society? After all, if parents are not honored, what authority WILL be honored? If society has no prohibition against arbitrary killing, stealing, or dishonest witness, will it not devolve into a chaos and anarchy? Or, how can the basic building block of society—the family—thrive if marital fidelity is compromised? We see effects of this latter in our own time in the breakup of innumerable families due to spousal infidelity and accompanying carnage wrought upon both parents and children, damaging perhaps beyond repair ability to trust and have enduring relationships. And, if trust is gone, the glue which holds families together is gone, and gone is the glue that binds society. If you can't trust family who are bound by natural tie, how trust anyone else?

We read that over the centuries following the Exodus, there is continued development of civilization and religion. First were emphasized the Ten Commandments and its essential “Thou shalt not's”. Then the prophets and the philosophies of the wisdom books. Centuries later comes Jesus, who expands that teaching from simple restriction from doing evil to emphasis of generosity of spirit, such is found in our Prodigal Son Parable, the Beatitudes (Matthew 5) and—both lauded and commanded by Jesus throughout the Gospels—in that exemplary virtue of forgiveness, also essential for cohesion of family and society. Forgiveness binds; hatred and burning grudges simply divide, and a society divided—a house divided—is doomed to fall; Jesus taught us that, too.

As scientific and engineering developments build upon earlier works and discoveries, so is the development of religion and civilization—the don't just “pop out” fully formed, but continually develop. In fact—like persons—civilization never finishes developing, but ever continues to seek new ways of furthering the common good ... even while encountering frequent and often severe growing pains.

One thing we might learn from this development of faith is the benefit of remembering the path. We don't forget/erase the Commandments because Jesus gives the Beatitudes. In our increasing so-called “woke” society, history is in danger of being erased in large measure. Yet, it is comparing and critiquing current actions to yesterdays' that we are able to improve. In preserving the memory of what was—even, and perhaps especially, that which was negative and bad, we can celebrate our continued forward development, recognizing and avoiding false paths which lead astray. If we forget (or erase) what was, we risk becoming victims of that principle: “Those who forget the past are doomed to repeat it.”

We can forget whatever we want to forget, but erasing it from history makes it much easier TO forget. Already the Holocaust is doubted in some circles, regardless of irrefutable evidence. So, rather than erase the negatives of history, perhaps it is more effective to maintain their remembrance so as to exclaim: “Look at the tragic way some treated others, and see what we've overcome! Now ... how can we continue to do better ourselves?” After all, we write and exhibit negative historical remembrances of things like slavery or dictatorships—not to laud them, but to remember in order to avoid such in the future, rejoicing in their elimination.

As a child is taught by painful experience to avoid that which hurts, so do we remember the lesser in order to work toward a greater ... while needing also to realize that we will never attain perfection, and therefore should neither expect nor demand it of others. But we need look with the clear vision of rationality rather than with blind loyalty or prejudice, focusing on improving and promoting that which is most universally beneficial and just. In that way society becomes a giant redwood—growing ever taller and stronger with each passing season.

“...test everything; hold fast what is good, abstain from every form of evil.” (1 Thessalonians 5:21-22)