

I would rather that he didn't use that word. Yeah, you understood me well. I would prefer that he didn't use the word "commandments." Every time I read this spectacular chapter 14 of the Gospel of Saint John with its beautiful, subtle, very hopeful and a little mysterious promise of the Holy Spirit, these commandments confuse me. He should know that in my world, when somebody says commandments, love becomes a duty. It becomes a task, a chore, some sort of policy. A very painful sign of somebody else's will burned on my life. In my world when somebody says commandments, love is not love anymore. That's why I don't like commandments. I can understand policies. I can respect the logic of laws even if I don't like them. But here he says, if you love me, you will keep my commandments. What could he possibly mean? In what world could following commandments, any commandments, be a sign of love?

Imagine this: you've been walking the whole day. You're exhausted and tired. You're in the middle of the desert and you are alone. You have a reason for this walk so you must keep going. Somebody is expecting your help. Somebody depends on you. In these moments, every next step is like a commandment - I must go; I don't feel happy or fulfilled; I don't feel joyful or inspired. It doesn't feel like it but it is hard and real love. I must keep going.

That exhausted, dry walk is a daily experience of our souls. That desert is a place in my heart that is deprived of the refreshing energy of God. I made it that way. How? By my selfishness, stupidity, lack of attention, blindness, anger and greed. All those millions of things that I call my personality are, in reality, simply a collection of my spiritual addictions. They turn the garden of Eden of my soul into an arid, bleak desert. Through this desert I must walk. So, we keep on walking and keep on thirsting because we love others, we love God, even if He is not very clear. This is the image Christ has in mind. If you love me, you will keep my commandments. You will take the next step; you will keep going and you will resist the next temptation. You will fight, maybe for only a minute longer, but you will. Why? Because sometimes that persistence is love.

This image is still quite horrible, is it not? Is that desert all that human life is? Jesus knows that we were not created just for that arid, desperate toil of walking. For human beings, faith, hope, and love cannot be a chore. And here is why he speaks to the disciples in chapter 14 of Saint John: I will give you another Advocate, another Comforter. The gift of the Father who will be with you always. I will give you the one who is a fresh and life-giving breeze in the heat of the desert. I will give you that water of life who, from within, will keep renewing you and bring back taste to your life. I will give you somebody who is an essence of life, who is the life itself. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you. This world doesn't know Him. This world is sterile. It cannot give life. Only the Father is the source of life, the never ending source of life. That's why he, the Spirit of Truth, will connect you to the Father, because he comes from the Father to you.

Although this speech sounds like some sort of sophisticated, mystical poem, it is, in reality, a promise of the true life. It is a promise that all our moral struggles, all difficult fights for truth, all confrontations with our own conscience, all wrestling with our own behavior, all longings for purity and peace, are not in vain and are not a mirage. They are not an illusion of a thirsty, desperate mind. They are, actually, already the beginnings of a life that is true and that is truly human, because it is given by the Father, redeemed by the Son, and strengthened by the Spirit.

Do not be afraid to believe in Christ. To love Christ. To keep his commandment. Do not be afraid to walk through this life following the Risen Lord. If this walk seems too difficult, too complicated, dark, or empty, turn to the Holy Spirit. Come Holy Spirit, and renew our hearts. Come Holy spirit and teach us to live for real.