

REFLECTION ON THE SCRIPTURE READINGS  
THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT, CYCLE B  
MARCH 6-7, 2021

Exodus 20:1-17

This week's first reading is one of the most famous passages in the Old Testament, a passage commonly referred to as "The Ten Commandments." It is not the only version of these commandments, a slightly different one is in Deuteronomy 5:6-21. The first three commandments are not just prohibitions of idolatry and work on the Sabbath. They are a call to do all we can to express our love, honor and respect for the God who loves us. We will naturally avoid the prohibitions of the first three commandments if we truly desire a loving relationship with God.

Just as God expects us to respect him, he also expects the same in our relationships with each other. Like the first three commandments, the last seven urge us to do more than avoid what is wrong. Although our parents are sinful and mistake-prone, we are called to honor them as the people who give us life and hand on our faith to us. If our parents have hurt us or failed us, have we found it within ourselves to forgive them? The fifth commandment challenges us not just to avoid killing, but to work to enrich the lives of others. The sixth commandment entails our becoming people who are faithful and trustworthy in more than just sexual matters. More than the mere avoidance of stealing, the seventh commandment calls us to attend to the needs of those who are deprived in any way, whether that be of life's necessities, or of their dignity and rights. A dedication to the truth in word and deed leads to the fulfillment of the eighth commandment. Finally, the envy that is prohibited by the ninth and tenth commandments is only the symptom of a greater spiritual malady, a failure to appreciate ourselves and our blessings.

Reflect on how the Ten Commandments are more than just prohibitions which limit our freedom, but maxims of wisdom which make sense for living life.

1 Corinthians 1:22-25

Paul begins by talking about the way Jews and Greeks, people of different cultures, perceive God's revelation. Jews look for displays of power, such as God's releasing his people from bondage, Greeks seek intellectual wisdom, especially through philosophy. What Paul has to offer is a crucified Christ. Jews would see Christ's death as shameful, perhaps the reward of a false prophet. Since low-class criminals who committed capital crimes were crucified, this is the way Greeks would have seen Jesus in his crucifixion. But for those who can comprehend the inner depths of Christian faith, Christ is the "power" (for Jews) and the "wisdom" (for Greeks) of God. In other words, Christ provides a revelation of God in the terms Jews and Greeks would expect. In his crucifixion Christ has displayed the power God to reconcile all people with himself. Christ's crucifixion is for Greeks a paradox. Greeks would see Christ as a crucified fool, but he has in fact revealed divine wisdom. By dying on the cross in obedience to his Father's will, Christ defeated the forces of evil and led all people to salvation. Therefore, God's "foolishness" (the way human beings would typically see Christ's execution) surpasses what Greeks hold to be wisdom. And God's "weakness" (the way Jews would view Christ's execution) is in fact a display of

divine power. So there is no reason for either Jews or Greeks not to believe.

Many in the world today might tend to see Jesus crucified as a fool and failure or as a defeated visionary. In what ways can we see God's wisdom and power at work in Christ's death?

John 2:13-25

While Matthew, Mark and Luke place Jesus' act of "cleansing" the Temple in the last phase of Jesus' public ministry, John places it near the beginning. It follows the first of Jesus' "signs" in John's Gospel, changing water to wine at a wedding in Cana. In the Cana episode, Jesus' act of replacing water with wine symbolizes the fact that he is the source of purification; no longer are the Jewish purification rituals applicable for those who believe in Jesus. Similarly, as Jesus drives out the merchants in the Temple he replaces the corrupt Temple community with his presence, and ultimately he replaces the Temple itself. When the Jews ask, "What sign can you show for doing this?" they are questioning what gives him the authority to disrupt the business being conducted in the Temple. In reply Jesus looks forward to his resurrection in a way that touches on an event that had happened by the time John's Gospel was written. The Temple, whose renovation was begun by Herod the Great and was continuing at the time of Jesus' ministry, had been destroyed by the Roman army in 70 AD. Because of his resurrection the "temple" of Jesus' body will become the locus of worship. Later in John's story, Jesus will tell the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well that a time is coming when people will worship neither on Mt. Gerazim (as Samaritans did) nor in Jerusalem, but "in spirit and in truth" (4:21).

What do we need Jesus to purify in our hearts so that they can be fitting "temples of the Holy Spirit"?