

The story of the Ten Commandments is a bittersweet one. Moses had ascended Mount Saini and met the Lord. The Lord provided guidance on how the Israelites were to live in right relationship with God and with their neighbors. God established an everlasting covenant for he seeks the holiness of his beloved children:

“Six days there are for doing work, but the seventh day is the sabbath of complete rest, holy to the LORD. Anyone who does work on the sabbath day shall be put to death. So shall the Israelites observe the sabbath, keeping it throughout their generations as an everlasting covenant. Between me and the Israelites it is to be an everlasting sign; for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, but on the seventh day he rested at his ease” (Ex 31:15-17).

After providing all Ten Commandments, the Lord inscribed them in stone. God’s own finger chiseled out the commandments on two stone tablets. What a loving God who wants to help us and show us the way.

The Israelites had grown weary of waiting for Moses to return. Often times when we are tired after a long day’s work, our own mind can wander to sinful thoughts. The Israelites who were called to love God with all of their hearts pierced the heart of God with the sin of idolatry. Unwilling to obey God, they pushed him aside in favor of a golden calf. They “offered sacrifice to the idol and reveled in the works of their hands” (Acts 7:41).

The ultimate consequence of grave sin is separation from God for eternity... a sobering thought in our day and age when people believe truth is self-defined rather than eternal. God’s Commandments do matter, and woe to the man can chooses to do whatever he likes with an ill-informed conscience.

The Book of Deuteronomy and Exodus tell us what happened next:

- Moses “took hold of the two tablets and with both hands cast them ... and broke them before [their] eyes” (Dt 9:17). Moses was livid. He destroyed the idolatrous golden calf, turned it into powder and made the Israelites drink water flavored with their sin.
- Three thousand received the death penalty and were slain.

We are often deceived by the true consequences of our turning from God. In selfishness, we turn to deadly sins fearing no consequence. How foolish.

Sins must be atoned for and Moses as the leader of the Israelites recognized he must make a sacrifice. “Then, as before, [Moses] lay prostrate before the LORD for forty days and forty nights; [he] ate no food, [he] drank no water, because of all the sin you had committed in the sight of the LORD, doing wrong and provoking him” (Dt 9:18).

Our own sins are atoned for in an even greater sacrifice. We have the faithful witness of many martyrs who shed their blood as revealed in a vision in the Book of Revelation: “These are the ones who have survived the time of great distress; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (7:14:15).

And the greatest of all sacrifices, is the Blood of the Lamb, the crucifixion of Jesus who suffered death offering his life for our salvation. We are reminded of this at each Mass as we are called to worthily receive Holy Communion. “Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb” (Roman Missal 667).

With his sacrifice, Moses stood in the breach to turn back God’s blazing anger (Ps 106). We can curse the sins of others, or we can follow the example of Moses, the Martyrs, and Jesus in offering penitential practices to seek God’s forgiveness for the sins of others. The Divine Mercy Chaplet is a most efficacious prayer petitioning God for mercy for others. Let us never hesitate to unite our own suffering and sacrifice with the cross to help Jesus in his saving act of redeeming the world.