

3rd Wednesday Lent 2021

Deuteronomy 4:1, 5-9

Moses spoke to the people and said:
“Now, Israel, hear the statutes and decrees which I am teaching you to observe, that you may live, and may enter in and take possession of the land which the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you.

Therefore, I teach you the statutes and decrees as the LORD, my God, has commanded me, that you may observe them in the land you are entering to occupy.

Observe them carefully,
for thus will you give evidence of your wisdom and intelligence to the nations, who will hear of all these statutes and say, ‘This great nation is truly a wise and intelligent people.’

For what great nation is there that has gods so close to it as the LORD, our God, is to us whenever we call upon him?
Or what great nation has statutes and decrees that are as just as this whole law which I am setting before you today?
“However, take care and be earnestly on your guard not to forget the things which your own eyes have seen, nor let them slip from your memory as long as you live, but teach them to your children and to your children’s children.”

Psalms 147:12-13, 15-16, 19-20

Glorify the LORD, O Jerusalem;
praise your God, O Zion.
For he has strengthened the bars of your gates;
he has blessed your children within you.
He sends forth his command to the earth;
swiftly runs his word!
He spreads snow like wool;
frost he strews like ashes.

He has proclaimed his word to Jacob,
his statutes and his ordinances to Israel.
He has not done thus for any other nation;
his ordinances he has not made known to them.

Matthew 5:17-19

Jesus said to his disciples: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets.

I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.
Amen, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or the smallest part of a letter will pass from the law, until all things have taken place.

Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do so will be called least in the Kingdom of heaven.

But whoever obeys and teaches these commandments will be called greatest in the Kingdom of heaven.”



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But whoever obeys and teaches these commandments will be called greatest in the Kingdom of heaven.”

Rules, rules, rules.

Does that sound like the laments of a teenager? A teenager knows what is good or bad when she sees it. A teenager knows that since he is good, that everything he does with good intentions must be good.

And you think that only applies to teenagers?

Rules, rules, rules.

The reason a teenager chaffs under the rules is that she distains the dominance of the parent. The parent enforces the rules with negative and positive reinforcement. If you are out past curfew, you are grounded. If you get all A's, you get a special reward. It just all seems to me like the behavior shaping that we do when we train our dogs.

So, we ask, “Isn't Jesus about freeing us from the law?” If one reads the letters of St. Paul, one might think so.

*For freedom Christ set us free; so stand firm and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery.
For through the Spirit, by faith, we await the hope of righteousness.*

(Gal 5:1,5-6)

And is Jesus showing contempt for the Pharisees, who are well known for their compliance to the Law?

I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter into the kingdom of heaven. (Mt 5:20)

As I perused the commentaries concerning the Law, they unequivocally refer to God's love. The Law was given for the welfare of a people whom God loves.

Now, I might be able to apprehend this with my teenage brain (I have 5 kids, my wife says she has 6). I've heard many a psychologist proclaim that children want restrictions. Who wants restrictions? What kid really feels that a "No" is for their own good?

It was brought home to me by Dr. James Dobson of the Family Institute. He spoke about a child's sense of security being dependent on defined limits.¹ He spoke about what it feels like to drive on a bridge across a wide and deep gorge. Then he asks what it would feel like if you were driving across that bridge without guardrails.

Now, I have a particular reaction to heights. It was a challenge when I worked at Public Safety when I had to rappel in SWAT practice or address a fire on the roof of an industrial plant. It's not so much "fear" as it is having my entire insides tied up in knots. Regardless, we proceed as needed.

Well, I experience that knotting up feeling whenever I drive over our beautiful Mackinac Bridge. I love that bridge. I do not love the queasiness I experience when driving over that bridge. I don't think anybody else in the car notices and I cross safe and sound—dozens of times.

Then I imagine what it would be like if there were no guardrails on the bridge. Now, I have never had any trouble staying within the lane lines painted on the bridge. Never once did I ever hit or come into contact with the guard rail designed to keep me out of the Straits. However, I can imagine how seized-up I would be if I could not see those reassuring guardrails.

Dr. Dobson maintains that that is how a child feels, all the time, when raised without defined limits.

That is what parental love looks like.

This is what God's love looks like:

*I have come not to abolish but to fulfill [the law].
Amen, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest*

letter or the smallest part of a letter will pass from the law, until all things have taken place.

Jesus is the incarnate manifestation of God. We can see what God's love looks like, sounds like and feels like. Jesus is the fulfillment of the law sent to keep us secure on our heavenly destination, the Eden we were made for.

When we are secure on our destination, we have a foretaste of Heaven. We intuitively understand, "Smell the roses on the way." We are reminded that the Kingdom is here and now... and yet, not quite yet.

Jesus say that our righteousness needs to surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees. They complied with the Law. How can we surpass that?

Jesus' criticism is that in their compliance with the law, they lost sight of the heart of the Law-giver.ⁱⁱ While we may negotiate the straight and narrow way, if we don't come into relationship with our God, where would the "way" take us?

We need to see what the heart of God looks like, sounds like and feels like. God knows. It is all in God's plan to save us.

Through Abraham, he established his Holy People. Through Moses he brought his people to the Promised Land. Through the Immaculate Virgin Mary, the Holy Spirit brought forth Jesus, the Son.

Our creator knows his people, that we need to see Him, hear Him, talk to Him and feel him. He does so through Jesus Christ.

Jesus said he would never leave us.ⁱⁱⁱ He instituted the Holy Eucharist so that at every Mass, we may see Him, taste Him, and become one with His True Presence.

Rules, rules, rules... and Love... all the way to Heaven.

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ⁱ Dr. James Dobson, Family Institute, <https://www.drjamesdobson.org/video/security-defined-limits>

ⁱⁱ Rev. Msgr. Thomas Martin, Presentation on the Sacrament of Marriage, Diocese of Kalamazoo 3-10-2021

ⁱⁱⁱ Gospel of Matthew 28:20