

Third Sunday of Lent B/2015

The readings of this third Sunday of Lent talk about the importance of God's Law. They show us the spiritual benefit which results from fulfilling it. They invite us to internalize God's Law and make it the guideline of our life.

The first reading of the book of Exodus recalls the Ten Commandments that God gave to Moses in order to seal his Covenant with Israel. It shows the content of the Law as referring to God and human beings. Finally, it states the religious and moral obligations that Israel has to fulfill in order to guarantee his relationship with God and his fellows.

What is behind this text is the idea that the Ten Commandments are a guarantee of the Covenant between God and Israel. There is also the idea that God, as the liberator and the savior of his people, has the prerogative of giving the Law that his people have to obey. The last idea is related to the truth that the respect of the Commandments is the guarantee of the success of Israel as a nation and of the Hebrews as people.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus kicks out of the temple the vendors and their merchandise. First of all, the Gospel says that, as Jesus found those people in temple area, he drove them all out by asking them to stop making a marketplace of the house of his Father.

It also talks about the riposte of the Jews who asked Jesus a sign for acting so. Then, the Gospel gives the answer of Jesus who invites the Jews to destroy the temple and to raise it in three days. Then, the Gospel says that Jesus was talking about the temple of his body, because after his resurrection everybody understood that is what he meant.

After that, the Gospel says that while Jesus was still in Jerusalem for the Passover, many began to believe in him when they saw the signs he was performing. The Gospel finishes by mentioning the fact that even so, Jesus did not believe the Jews because he knew them very well.

What do we learn from today's Gospel? Today I want to talk about the purpose of God's Law. In order to let you understand the point I want to make, let me start with an observation from the psychology of behavior. In fact, the psychology of behavior teaches us that children who grow up without any guiding law end up by becoming wild, like animals. Like them, they act according to the mood of their character and obey only what their instincts dictate them to do. With such a behavior, it is possible to find them in trouble with society and its social regulations.

What psychology tries to tell us is that the law is important. It shapes human behavior and determines our character. It structures our living together as individuals and society. It facilitates our relationship with one another and helps us recognize the limits of our individual freedom and the respect we owe to others. Without the law, life becomes a jungle where only the strongest have the right to exist.

The law is important not only for the functioning of human society, but also for our relationship with God. It is in that context that we have to understand the Ten Commandments as given by God to Moses in order to consolidate his relationship with Israel. They play the role of a roadmap in order to make our relationship with God and our fellows strong. Like in civil society where the absence of the Law is detrimental to a

good functioning of society, the commandments are vital to our relationship with God and with one another. That is why God's Law is the mirror of the will of God and the canvas or the framework through which the people of God have to mould their behavior in their relationship with God and their fellows. It is given for our benefit and for our good so that by respecting it we might live in true friendship with God. Not to respect the Law is to let life become chaotic and without guiding principles.

However, the Law has to be fulfilled in the spirit of God's covenant and not according to human interests. That is the reason why Jesus reacted violently by kicking out of the temple vendors and money changers. Of course, those activities in the temple were legitimate, according to the Law of Moses. However, those who were exercising them did not respect the Law and God's worship at all. On the contrary, they were driven only by their profits and commercial benefits.

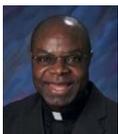
Moreover, Jesus acted as he did in order to teach us that any worship of God that is done only in order to obey the law without the heart given to God is irrelevant. In the same way, any sacrifice we bring in the Church should be an expression of what lies in the depth of our heart. After all, a true sacrifice to God is our very self. That is why the true worship of God is done in spirit and in truth, and not that which is simply external. In truth, God is not interested in hypocritical display, but in sincere contrition and conversion of heart.

In that sense, by driving out the merchants from the temple, Jesus reminds us that our relationship with God is not a matter of trade. Any time we forget this truth we degrade religion by using it for economic interests. This is a permanent temptation before us. Sometimes, I feel embarrassed when, after a session of pastoral counseling, someone asks of me: "How much, Father, shall I pay you"? I do not sell the service I offer. If someone would like to support me or the Church, that is fine. But, my service is not to be sold.

Finally, by driving out of the temple money-changers and those who were with them, Jesus wanted to purify the temple so that it gains its original meaning as a place of prayer, healing and blessing. This particular point challenges us profoundly about our attitude in the Church before, during and after the Holy Mass. I know that given the way our society functions, it is not always easy to meet friends and socialize. In that sense, Sunday becomes an opportunity to meet people we did not see during the week and chat a little bit about some issues of life. However, we should not forget that the Church is a place of prayer, not only during the Mass, but at any time.

In this time of Lent, let us ask the Lord to help us become the temples of the presence of God and obedient to his commands. May God bless you all!

Exodus 20: 1-17; 1 Cor. 1: 22-25; John 2: 13-25



Homily Date: March 8, 2015
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Contact: www.mbala.org
Document Name: 20150308homily.pdf