

Homily
March 3, 2024
Third Sunday of Lent
1:15 - 15:52

Two weeks ago, we heard of Noah and the Noadic Covenant, that God formed with Noah and all of humanity. Last week we heard of the Abrahamic Covenant, God's relationship with Abraham and his promise to Abraham that he would be the father of many nations. And today, we hear of the Mosaic Covenant of the Ten Commandments.

Guess what we're going to hear about next week. Well, you'll have to wait. (Laughter)

The Ten Commandments – They are not, by the way, the Ten Suggestions. They are God's way of speaking to us and to our ancestors. Our passage is from Exodus 20:1-17. There is a parallel passage in Deuteronomy Chapter 5. It's parallel, but somewhat different. If you ever want to lay them down next to each other, it's a good exercise in understanding the variety of approaches that the people of God had over the centuries as Jews.

In today's reading God speaks. – There's no prophet. Not even Moses speaks here. - It's a direct, non-mediated, privileged communication by God of God's moral demands on the people of Israel. Now, there are 633 precepts in the Mosaic Covenant and all have moral weight. But these ten are specifically noted. Perhaps because they are the ten recorded on the tablets that Moses will bring down from the mountain later.

Not the Fifteen that Moses brought down in a particular movie by Mel Brooks. He dropped one of the tablets and then said, "15 – oops, nope – 10." (Laughter) It's a hilarious scene.

Today I want to focus on just the first three, those which outline the relationship with God. It begins, "I the Lord am your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that place of slavery. You shall not have other gods besides me." God is saying, "I wish to have a relationship with you." But it's going to be exclusive.

In part, this exclusivity is a denial of the existence of other gods. And yet it is also a call to allegiance of the one God, to worship of the one God.

This Commandment goes on saying, "You shall not carve idols for yourselves in the shape of anything in the sky above or on the earth below, or in the waters beneath the earth. You shall not bow down before them or worship them."

Idols or "likeness." The Lord is saying here that no natural thing can represent the divine. In fact, throughout the Old Testament we never are given a picture of God. What we are given – He is revealed in light, fire, smoke, cloud, trumpet blast and through messengers. We call them angels, or archangels.

Ultimately, God wishes for us to avoid distractions from the exclusive relationship we are to have with the one God. But that raises the question: If we're prohibited from idols, what does God know about us?

What are your idols? What are mine? What do we shape, carve or mold and then collect, amass, or place on pedestals or divine knick-knack shelves, in our homes that are idols for us? “Godlets.”

Are they possessions? Do you have a favorite possession that you just can’t live without? (I’ve seen some people who worship their cars. But they don’t ask me to bless them. I wonder why.)

Or what about idolizing another person? Have you ever done that? In my day as a teenager, it was The Beatles. You know? The Fab Four. I witnessed, sitting in my back yard, the screams at the State Fairgrounds of all those young ladies just going nuts over these four. But I got to hear the **music!**

Or what of the present-day idyllic figure? Can you name one? Maybe Taylor Swift and all the Swifties? I’m not saying bad things about them. But is this person more important than God?

Or what about sports figures? Or anyone to whom we give more attention and value than God in Christ Jesus!

You know, we believe that Jesus is the very revelation of God. But still and all, there is no photograph of Jesus. There is no etching of Jesus himself. We only have images of him that are the fruit of imagination, devotion and culture. And then there are statues and frescoes of saints and of Mary. Like Joseph, here (gesturing to the right of the pulpit) off in the corner. Quietly standing, almost ignored, just like Joseph.

Or these two wonderful different paintings. (pointing toward the Chapel & old Confessional) One is a fresco and the other is on a different medium.

Or Jesus on the crucifix. These are all images conjured for our benefit, to point toward the Christ. To point toward God in Christ.

They are not idols for worship. They are arrows, pointing. Especially pointing to the life of the individual portrayed, of their life in Christ and in God.

“You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.” Now, this is not the same “vain” in the Carley Simon hit of the past. “You’re so vain, I...” Do you remember that one? “♪ You’re so vain, you probably think this song is about you. ♪” No! That’s not the “vain” here.

“Vain” in this passage refers to things of no good purpose. The worthless, empty, hollow use of God’s name. The context of it is the prohibition against swearing falsely. One is not to curse using God’s name. Anybody here ever do that?

I did once. In the back yard behind the garage, playing with one of my trucks. I was a little boy. And I don’t even remember what happened. I just know I ripped off, “G-D...” And who came around the corner of the garage at that moment? Mother. Mother, who grabbed me by the ear, took me in the house, quickly cleaned me up, gave me

over to Dad. Who took me out to St. Andrew's Church that I might confess this horrible thing that I had just done. - I avoid such a curse to this day, knowing that Mother will hear from heaven, and I can just hear it, "Richard Martin!"

Or what about...we really aren't supposed to use the name of our God or Jesus as sort of an empty exclamation, like, "Oh my God!" or "Jesus!"

And we are not to use it casually without truly acknowledging the power in this name. You know the throwaway comments we have, "Oh thank God!" Or "Praise the Lord!" And they are just hollow.

And we are not to use, "I swear to God." Because often, you see, that's a lie. Have you ever heard, "I swear to God, I'm going to kill you, child." Anybody ever hear that? That's a lie. You're not going to kill your child.

Or a true swearing to God with no follow-through. The power of the name there is used in vain: to no good use.

My brothers and sisters, to speak God's name or Jesus' name on the lips with no connection to one's heart is also something we should avoid. Think back to the Gospel of Matthew, "Those who say, 'Lord, lord,' but do not live in God's ways..." They're hypocrites and they will not enter the Kingdom.

Or those who say Jesus' name, but are hollow Christians. They bear the name, but only on the surface. Not in the heart.

"Remember to keep holy the Sabbath Day." Recall our Abrahamic roots. Each Abrahamic faith in this day and age has a special day of praise and worship. Jews, we know – the Sabbath, Saturday, the Seventh Day. The Lord's Day modeled as we heard in the Commandments, upon God's resting, giving a model to benefit the human that we might rest and focus in thanksgiving for God's creating and sustaining hand. Our Jewish brothers and sisters, yet still, from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset, do that.

And then we Christians – Sunday, the Eighth Day, the Lord's Day through Christ in the Easter Resurrection, that central gift of hope in Christ. That's why we're here.

And then our Muslim brothers and sisters – Friday is their day. It's the Sixth Day, when God finished creating. And they rejoice in that.

They're not equal. They're different, but still and all, they're a day for God.

For us Christians / Catholics we are to observe Sunday personally and communally. Personally, because we're baptized into Christ. Communally, because we are the body of Christ. To gather. To be present to each other and to our God.

We are to focus on God in Christ on Sundays. For God is God, exclusively. This day is our day to nurture God in Christ's holy name within us. More than just on our lips.

Brothers and sisters, how is our relationship with God right now? The One. The Almighty. The Creator. The Redeemer. The Sanctifier. Is this God the exclusive God in our lives? Or do we still have our idols?

What about our use of the name of God? Is it prayerful, or hollow?

And whose day in Christ is to be honored by us all? It is the Lord's.

Three Commandments of how we are to live in our relationship with God. Perhaps this week is a good week for us to reflect upon how we are doing in our relationship with the one God in Christ.