

## FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK



THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT - March 19, 2006 B

### THE TEN COMMANDMENTS. RIGHTEOUS AND UNRIGHTEOUS ANGER

Our first reading is one of the two versions of the Ten Commandments that we find in the Old Testament. (The second version can be read in Deut. 5:6-21). On Mt. Sinai, God entered in a holy covenant relationship with the people of Israel whom he had just delivered from the slavery of Egypt. (See Exodus ch.19). Briefly, the covenant relationship states: *“that God (alone) will be Israel’s God. He will travel with them offering protection and guidance. In response, Israel will follow God’s ways.”* To help the people of Israel understand more concretely what God expected of them, he gave them the Decalogue (“Ten Words”), better known as the “Ten Commandments”. The first three commandments have to do with Israel’s relationship with God and the last seven have to do with the people’s relationships with each other.

In the *first commandment* God calls Israel to worship God *alone and* forbids them to carve any images of him. Israel’s neighbors had many gods and also had carven images of them, which they *worshipped*. God is greater than any human attempt to capture him in an icon or statue. God knows that it is easy to move from *veneration* of an image to *worship* of it hence the reason for the condemnation of carved images. Carved images—especially beautiful icons and works of art can put us in touch with God in a very real way. And yes, we can and should *venerate* such images. But, of course we should *never worship* them or give them undue attention.

“I am a jealous God”. God’s ‘jealously’ is like the protective care a parent has for his/her children. Also, it means that God must be first in our lives. He will not tolerate competition. Finally, it has been well said that if we sincerely follow the *first commandment*, following the other nine will be much easier. On the other hand if we tend to ignore the first commandment, we will all too easily fail when it comes to following the other nine.

The *second commandment* calls on Israel to honor God’s name. In fact they so revered God’s name that they avoided using it at all. In prayer, they used another name for God, *Adonai* i.e. Lord. Especially forbidden is the use of God’s name for purposes of perjury, magic and curses. The *third commandment*

calls on Israel to set aside one day a week for worship of God. This commandment also insured that workers especially slaves had some time off.

The fourth through the tenth commandments were intended to safeguard, protect and uphold those values upon which a holy and wholesome society is built, e.g. family ties and parental respect (fourth); reverence for life (fifth); marriage and fidelity (sixth); the rights of proprietorship (seventh); honesty and sincerity (eight); and home and hearth (ninth and tenth).

The seven commandments which address Israel’s social relationships are very much derived from the first three commandments, for when life with God is rightly ordered and honored, life with others will, most likely, be also healthy and holy.

### The Righteous Anger of Jesus

In today’s first reading we are presented with an image of Jesus that may be difficult for us to consider. In the reading, Jesus is as ‘mad as hell’ with what he sees going on in the Temple area which should be a place of prayer. Can you imagine Jesus outside our church knocking over my book tables and whipping my book salesmen. Wow! We might say: “What’s up with Jesus? Wasn’t his reaction to the commercialism outside church a bit over the top or more accurately way over the top?” So why was Jesus so angry?

Selling animals and changing money in the Temple wasn’t bad in itself. In fact, it was a necessity because only a certain type of coin was permitted in the Temple. Cattle and sheep were sold for sacrifice so that people didn’t have to drag their animals through miles of desert. What enraged Jesus was the cheating and manipulation. Money changers gave people \$2 for \$3, while others overcharged for animals needed for sacrifice. Jesus got as ‘mad as hell’ because God’s house, which should be a place of true worship, had become a place of greed, a place where the poor were taken advantage of. This outraged Jesus as it outraged the prophets. Listen to what God says through the prophet Amos about worship that wasn’t leading people to be concerned for the poor:

*I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.*

*Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and cereal offerings,*

*I will not accept them, and the peace offerings of your fatted beasts I will not look upon.*

*Take away from me the noise of your songs;*

*To the melody of your harps I will not listen.*

*But let justice roll down like waters;*

*And righteousness like an ever flowing stream*

(Am 5:21; also see, Is 1:12-17; Hos 6:6; 8:11-13)

### **Our monthly practice of bringing to church food for the poor is a good reminder that true worship**

**of** God must lead to concern for the poor or God will be very upset to put it mildly.

### **But Shouldn't We Have Problems With the Way Jesus Displayed His Anger?**

Can you imagine what kind of society we would have if everyone followed Jesus' example and expressed their anger as he did? Also, is there a danger that people with an abusive personality might use today's gospel to justify abusive behavior? So why did Jesus display his anger in the way he did? I don't have a clear answer. I read many commentaries on today's gospel and none of them spoke to this question.

We might say that Jesus wanted the people to never forget the point he was trying to make. After all, if Jesus had merely come to the money-changers and said: "Lads, I think you shouldn't be taking advantage of the poor outside God's Temple", I doubt that they would have gotten the point. They would have simply blown away his remark as one of a young fanatic. But the way he did express his outrage would be remembered for a long time especially by his disciples.

Also, the Bible does have other examples of very unusual actions by the great men of God. They would do something most unusual to get the people's attention. One such example is the 'loincloth incident' in Jer 13:1-11. Another is the 'eating of the scroll' incident in Ezekiel (2:1-10). Both incidents like the incident in today's gospel were very dramatic ways of getting the people's attention. If we read the gospel, we will see that Jesus was angry lots of times especially with the Pharisees but he never displayed his anger in such a dramatic or violent way. And neither should we.

### **'Righteous Anger' and 'Unrighteous Anger'**

Righteous anger is the anger we should feel in the face of a great wrong or injustice done to us or others. Dr. Martin Luther King and his co-workers and Nelson Mandela had righteous anger about racial prejudice. Many people in our church had a sense of righteous anger towards bishops for the way they handled the

sex abuse scandals. Many are still angry. Righteous anger drove Mother's Against Drunk Drivers (MADD) to fight for legislation in this area. Without righteous anger lots of injustices would go unnoticed. If we didn't feel a sense of righteous anger in the face of great wrongs there would be something seriously wrong with our conscience. We praise God for the anger that moves us to redress injustices wherever they exist.

The other extreme is the anger expressed by people with an abusive personality. Many spouses and children live in abusive homes; in a home where a spouse parent usually the man, cannot control his anger. This leads to terrible damage in the emotional and spiritual lives of millions and millions of people. In extreme cases, abuse leads to serious physical damage or even death. Unfortunately, domestic violence is a huge problem in our country. But abuse also happens in the work place.

If you are interested in exploring what goes on in the mind of an abuser, you may want to consider reading a book called: *Why Does He Do That - Inside the Minds of Angry and Controlling Men*, by Lundy Bancroft. The Colligans who gave our recent marriage retreat recommended the book to me as a resource. The book deals with four main areas:

- The Nature of Abusive Thinking
- The Abusive Man in Relationships
- The Abusive Man in the World
- Changing the Abusive Man

"He says he loves you. So . . . Why does he do that?" The above book will help you to find an answer to the question.

### **Dealing with our Anger**

Lots of things can get us angry. Some are serious and some are trivial. If we have been seriously wronged, we have every right to seek justice. If the matter is small e.g. slow drivers, then we need to learn to deal in a mature way with our anger. If our anger is righteous anger we should use it to redress some wrong or injustice without allowing our hearts to be filled with hatred for our offender. This of course is no small challenge.

But somewhere along the way we have to try to forgive those who have hurt us or done us wrong. If we don't, we foolishly give our offender power over our emotional and spiritual lives and we run the risk of

damaging even our physical health. In a small book called *The Healing Power of Forgiveness*, Jean Maalouf writes:

*When we hate our enemies, we are giving them power over us: power over our sleep, our appetites, our blood pressure, our health, and our happiness. Our enemies would dance with joy if only they knew how they were worrying us, lacerating us, and getting even with us! Our hate is not hurting them at all, but our hate is turning our days and nights into a hellish turmoil.*

Then Maalouf goes on to tell the story of a woman with breast cancer who visited a spiritual counselor. He writes:

*This woman was suffering for some time because she had undergone several operations while the cancer was spreading throughout her system. The counselor advised her to spend some time alone everyday, to meditate, and to forgive everybody and everything.*

*She did. Among many different lines she read and meditated on, one particularly drew her attention, when St. Paul recommended to “put on the breastplate of faith and love” (1 Thess 5:8). This line inspired her prayer: Christ is healing me. I put on the breastplate of faith and love and forgiveness and righteousness. I cast all my burdens of injury, hurt, resentment, and bitterness on Christ who is my savior and who sets me free. I am free of every illness. I am healthy. Thank you, God.*

*For several days, she prayed this way with a heart full of love, hope, and determination. Subsequently, to the astonishment of her doctor, the lump in her breast disappeared and she was completely healed.*

*This story is one of many similar stories that can be found in the medical records to prove that forgiveness and love have the power to dissolve gallstones, cancers, tumors, and other similar diseases. What the medical records tell us is that, when we are in a state of unforgiveness, our bodies start to manufacture extra chemicals— like adrenaline, adrenocorticotrophic hormone, and cortisone—that build up in the bloodstream. If a situation like this continues for a while unchecked, gastric ulcers and other serious illnesses can result.*

*Bitter thoughts make bitter cells. Better thoughts make better cells. Forgiving and loving thoughts create healing cells.*

*Anger and resentment are not directed only to our enemies or strangers who hurt us along the way.*

*Members of the same family can harbor hatred and undeclared resentment for each other. They may even stop talking to one another, which is a terrible deprivation. How difficult it is to resolve family feuds! Such feuds are especially difficult and painful because we expect the bonds between family members to be powerful, intimate, and supportive.*

March 20th is the Feast Day of St. Joseph the husband of Mary.

#### PRAYER TO ST. JOSEPH

O blessed Joseph,  
faithful guardian of my Redeemer,  
Jesus Christ,  
protector of thy chaste spouse,  
the virgin Mother of God,  
I choose thee this day  
to be my special patron and advocate  
and I firmly resolve to honor thee  
all the days of my life.  
Therefore I humbly beseech thee  
to receive me as thy client,  
to instruct me in every doubt,  
to comfort me in every affliction,  
to obtain for me and for all  
the knowledge and love of the  
Heart of Jesus,  
and finally to defend and protect me  
at the hour of my death. Amen

Have a great week

