

## 011010 WHY WERE THE COMMANDMENTS NOT ENOUGH?

(In the waters of baptism we are washed clean of the effects of the original sin but much more happens than that.)

### **The Ten Commandments**

I am the Lord thy God, thou shalt not have strange gods before me.

Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.

Remember to keep holy the Lord's Day.

Honor your father and your mother.

Thou shalt not kill.

Thou shalt not commit adultery.

Thou shalt not steal.

Thou shalt not bear false witness.

Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife.

Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's goods.

These are known as the Ten Commandments. We actually don't hear too much about the Ten Commandments in our preaching anymore. The most we hear is when a town or municipality is being challenged to take down a copy of the Ten Commandments that hangs somewhere in a public space. These Ten Commandments have been around for a long time—about 3200 years. They were given to Moses on Mount Sinai around twelve hundred years before the birth of Christ. Why were they not enough, however?

What do I mean when I ask that question? Why do people now, as then, still struggle so hard with the keeping of them? Why do people so easily disregard them and not live by their truth? Why do people think that these are basically good for most people most of the time but not for themselves all of the time? What is missing?

To answer that question we have to delve into the Tradition in the Church, specifically that of original sin. Remember the story of our first parents who are given life and surrounded by good things but are asked by God to live within certain limitations and restrictions for their own good? Do you remember how they looked at what had not been given to them, and recognizing that what had not been offered was still very good, they reached out and took what had not been offered? In that moment they displayed their disdain for what God had asked. They chose not to put their trust in the word God had spoken to them. They did not give the acquiescence of their own obedient heart. They disobeyed, mistrusted and took what had not been given. That whole event unleashed such negativity in our world that

everyone born into this world is affected by it. Thus, we speak of the effect of original sin on each person.

The effect of original sin has really messed things up. What do I mean? Our first parents still thought that they were seeing things clearly even when they were not. Their intellects were darkened. They found themselves susceptible to that which might appear to be good but was not actually good. And they found themselves lacking the basic and necessary strength to choose to do the right things.

As a result when God reveals the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, it is 700 or 800 years after he has called Abraham and begun the process of creating a people peculiarly his own to whom these commandments would be given. The Commandments are God's way of revealing to us those areas in our lives where we tend to go astray and make a mess of things. When we leave God and God's concerns out of the picture or use God's name as an expletive or fail to give the adoration of the heart to God, we mess things up. When we do not respect the parents that gave us life, when we allow ourselves to give into the anger and violence within or lust after those around us or take what is not rightfully ours or use the truth to manipulate others or yield to the inordinate and greedy desires to have what those around us have, then we really do tend to make a mess of things. So God chooses to speak clearly and chooses to set a clear picture before us. We know that these things are harmful, wrong, perhaps even destructive. But still, there is something missing.

Just knowing what is wrong or harmful or destructive is not enough. There is something more that is needed. We cannot keep the commandments on our own. We do not really "get" what this life is all about on our own. We have not the inner strength to keep God's commandments on our own. We need help. We need to be empowered. We need to be strengthened. We need to be enabled from within by a power which originates outside of ourselves but is given to us so that we will have requisite strength.

And John the Baptist says: "One mightier than I is coming after me. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit of God and with the fire of righteous desire." That is why Jesus has come. We cannot get back to God on our own. We cannot do the good on our own. We do not even know the right thing to want on our own although we tend to think we do. We need help. We need to be saved—saved from the effect of those sins done unto us, saved from the effect of those sins we have committed ourselves. And we need power, holy power, a holy power that only God can give because I do not have it in myself.

Who can save me? Where can I get this power? Jesus can save me. Jesus not only has this power but has already given this very power to me in the moment of my baptism. You and I have been baptized into Christ. What Christ has accomplished we now share in. But we have to believe it. The Commandments, the law, is just there. It is right and true but it is not enough for it just to be there. We need the very Spirit of God so that we can live the commandments. And that is precisely what we have been given. The gift has already been given. But you know how it is sometimes with gifts. Sometimes we have something but we don't realize just what it is that we have and therefore we can't use it properly, can't utilize it properly until much later.

You and I have now within us precisely what we need to keep the commandments. With baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit nothing is missing any more. The Spirit has been poured into us. The Spirit dwells within us. We are not to ask God for Him to send his Spirit as if He has not already done so. We are to pray in thanksgiving for the gift of the Spirit and for the grace to realize the gift, to cooperate with the gift, to embrace the gift as it has been given. For you and me, in the power of the Spirit, the Commandments are enough and more than enough. The more we live in the Spirit the Ten Commandments become less and less arduous or difficult. The more we live in the power of the Spirit we find that we want to give ourselves more completely to God; we find we want to live for and help our neighbors more; we find that we do not want to hate ourselves but to love ourselves too. The two great Commandments of Jesus now begin to come into play and the sky is the limit for there is no limit to love. None. We cannot do this on our own, remember. But, we are not on our own.