

# Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year B

## Third Sunday of Lent

### **First reading:**

(Exodus 20.1-17)

*The Ten Commandments*

The ten commandments are not harsh rules, but an invitation to Israel, showing them how to be God's people: if you wish to keep close to God, you must behave in a way compatible with God's own nature. They come in an order opposite to the priorities of the modern materialistic world, for God comes first, then values of persons, and values of things and possessions only at the end.

We need to think of them not as prohibitions but as expressing positive values. So 'keep holy the Sabbath day' implies freedom of worship and freedom for leisure. 'Honour your parents' includes not only obedience of children, but real parental care for children and of adult children for aged parents, as well as other family values. 'No adultery' means fostering the marriage bond and continually deepening it. 'No false evidence' includes the right to free speech, and a good reputation, free of slander, no brain-washing or distortion by school systems or by the media.

Many of these laws come in other ancient law codes, but in Israel they have a different meaning, for here they are the guidelines for living under divine protection and in the company of the Lord.

### **Question:**

Is any of the ten commandments more important than the others?

### **Second reading:**

(1 Corinthians 1.22-25)

*The Scandal of the Cross*

This reading is all about power and wisdom: 'The Jews demand miracles (works of power) and the Greeks look for wisdom.' These are two measures of success in the normal terms of our modern materialistic society.

Power comes in the form of wealth, authority, command, being the boss. Wisdom results in the respect and reputation accorded to a person: he or she makes the right decisions. But where are these in the crucified Christ? He was a prisoner, powerless, horribly tortured, mocked and derided. He commanded nobody. There is no respecting a tortured prisoner.

God's standards are different, and we heard them in the form of the commandments in the first reading. It was these standards that brought Jesus to the situation of the Passion, for these were the standards he had sought to live out and show to people by his way of living and acting. This was the Kingship of God which he came to proclaim and to spread. In the first reading, we heard the demanding, positive standards for membership of God's people. Now, in this second reading, we receive strength and comfort from the reassurance of the model of Christ, the only ideal of the Christian.

### **Question:**

What are the qualities of true wisdom?

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## Gospel:

*(John 2.13-25)*

### *The Cleansing of the Temple*

According to John, this scene took place at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, on the first of Jesus' four visits to Jerusalem. At each subsequent visit the Temple authorities lay in wait for Jesus, increasingly keen to eliminate him, but unable to do so until his hour had come.

The other gospels place as the final climax both this incident and all other scenes of Jesus in Jerusalem. Whichever is correct, the incident is the basic cause of Jesus' arrest and tortured death.

By his action, Jesus had demonstrated that the worship carried out in the Temple was vain in God's eyes and must be superseded. To the Temple authorities, this was intolerable, and he must be removed. Again, Jesus demanded a complete reversal of standards. His puzzling saying about building the Temple anew in his body was at last understood by his disciples to mean the Temple that was his Body, the Church. The material building that had been the centre of worship was no longer important. Henceforth all worship would take place in any place, but within the Christian community. The community - or the Church - was now the place of sanctification and of prayer to God.

## Question:

What was Jesus trying to show by his demonstration in the Temple?

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