

Homily. 3rd Sunday of Lent. Year.B. 6/7 March 2021.

The commandments are many, for the observant Jew there are over 600 of them needing obedience, many more than the 10 we know best. Still, as it is with the laws of our land, they are powerless to save us from ourselves and the worst within us as recent public events have once again made abundantly clear. The Jewish people understood this, as did God, for they had, and still do have, an annual Solemn Day of Atonement to acknowledge their failures and beg God's forgiveness.

Moreover, laws can only tell us what to do and what not to do. They have no inner power to aid us in the doing of good or the avoiding of evil. Their success entirely depends upon each person's ability to understand these laws and rules and everyone's willingness to apply these precepts in their daily living. As an observant Jewish man of His time Jesus knew the laws and sought to practice them and live according to them. He also became aware of the heavy burden they placed on many people who simply couldn't live them, often due to no fault of their own. As He went His way He saw the shame and guilt carried by many of His people and how some used the laws to manipulate and oppress others to their own advantage.

Something had to change and in only the 2nd chapter of John's gospel we heard about Jesus throwing down the gauntlet to those who profited, not simply materially but also in terms of power over others, because of the laws. In knocking over the tables of money changers and driving the animal sacrifice sellers from the Jerusalem Temple, Jesus was kicking over the old laws and the covenant of legalism so that space could be created for a new and better way, the way of love, relationships and

mutual obligation based on service. Jesus 'zeal' for God's house was 'zeal' for what God wanted, a place of prayer and mercy for all instead of a market place of extortion that excluded many.

In reply to the Jewish authorities who challenged what He had done, Jesus offered Himself, hinting at the new temple and sanctuary of God's holiness and life that was His own body. As it came to pass His entire self would be lovingly sacrificed for the forgiveness of all who would, with faith, turn and look to Him. Faith-filled people find in Him a body raised up, full of God's Spirit, the Holy Spirit now living in us. Later in His ministry when even more questions were asked about what He did and believed, Jesus replied with the great commandment of love of God and neighbour. He taught that the two sides of this commandment depended on each other and that this one Great commandment fulfilled all of the teachings of the many old laws and the words of the prophets of God, too.

In John's gospel, as we'll hear and see at Holy Thursday night's Mass of the Lord's Supper, Jesus showed the true meaning of God's love for us by stooping down like a servant and washing the dirt off of our feet, commanding us to do the same for each another. This is the reality of living the new covenant sealed in the sacrificial blood of Christ. It sounds, to quote St. Paul's words, like madness and foolishness to many, but to those called to share in the Lord's servant loving in this Eucharist it has become the strength and wisdom of God, the words of everlasting life.