



THE MISSION OF SAINT MARY MAGDALENE

Father Alan's Blog for the Third Sunday in Lent March 20, 2022

“Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

St. Matthew 22:37-40 (KJV)

A few years ago I came across a rather famous or infamous editorial cartoon in the newspaper. It was a picture of Moses, having come down from the top of Mt. Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments from God and holding up two stone tablets while announcing to the nation of Israel assembled in front of him:

“I've got some good news and some bad news. The good news is there's only ten of them. The bad news is we can't change the name to 'The Ten Suggestions'.”



In another editorial cartoon I once saw captioned, “Genesis of the Trial Attorney”, Moses, holding up two stone tablets, is again pictured standing before the nation of Israel, and one man, sporting a closely-cropped beard and a briefcase, points a finger at him and says:

“Okay, you say 'Commandments', but I hear 'Recommendations'.”



As we heard last week, God delivered the law to Moses on Mt. Sinai by giving him Ten Commandments carved upon two tablets of stone:

- ☞ **Four of these Commandments were inscribed on the first tablet and dealt with how we should love God; and**
- ☞ **Six Commandments were engraved on the second tablet and dealt with how we should love our neighbour.**

Accordingly, as our Lord Jesus Christ emphasized 1,500 years later (St. Matthew 22:37-40), the whole of God's law is founded on these two precepts of loving God and neighbour:

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

As a consequence, many so-called Christians today really do not see the need to obey the Ten Commandments in totality, citing that they are ancient Jewish laws (which have been superseded by what Jesus said above), and further, by what He accomplished through the Cross of Calvary – namely our salvation from sin and death and, also, **freedom FROM the law**. Yet, as **TRUE Christians**, it is best if we each endeavour to keep all ten of them. For, as St. John counselled in his First General Epistle (2:3-6):

"Now by this we know we know Him if we keep His commandments. He who says 'I know Him', and does not keep His commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk just as He walked."

Interestingly, Jesus Himself praised the Church at Ephesus for doing the very same thing when He “dictated” to His scribe St. John the Apostle (Revelation 2:22):

“And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars.”



So then, who are “true Christians” and not “liars”? To help answer this question, let’s read further on in the Book of Revelation to see what it has to say on the subject:

1. *“And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.” (12:17);*
2. *“Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.” (14:12); and*
3. *“Blessed are those who do His commandments that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city.” (22:14).*

Also, according to American pastor Dr. Bob Thiel on COGWriter.com, Holy Scripture attests to the following:

- ☞ **First, all of the Ten Commandments are mentioned as being in effect *even before Mount Sinai*;**
- ☞ **Second, Jesus taught all ten of them;**
- ☞ **Third, all ten of them were in effect *after the crucifixion*;**
- ☞ **Fourth, St. Paul taught all ten of them, specifically noting that they were not done away with; and**
- ☞ **Fifth all ten of them are mentioned by various other New Testament writers.**

Thus, any views which advocate that the Ten Commandments are no longer pertinent are what I would call “traditions of men” – which our Lord Jesus strongly denounced (St. Matthew 15:6):

“Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition.”

Moreover, in my humble opinion, **it would be contrary to what Holy Scripture clearly says** to teach today’s Christians that the Ten Commandments are no longer in effect. Not surprisingly, then, I agree wholeheartedly with King Solomon’s conclusion to his Old Testament Book of Ecclesiastes (12:13b):

“Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind.”

As I mentioned last week, in order to ascertain their meaning for us in today’s world (in general) and in this Lenten season (in particular), today we will begin our detailed examination of each of the Ten Commandments (as found in Exodus 20:1-17), starting with the four that pertain to loving God.



The First Commandment (Exodus 20:3):

“Hear the Law of God which was given to Israel in old time. God spake these words and said: I am the LORD thy God; Thou shalt have none other gods but me.”

This commandment forbids the worship of false gods and goddesses. In addition, it excludes **polytheism** (the belief in many gods), insisting instead on **monotheism** (the belief in only one God). Likewise, the worship of **created things**, such as celestial bodies (e.g., the sun, moon, stars, and planets), or flora (e.g., trees, flowers, and other plants), or fauna (e.g., cows, bulls, fish, and birds), being also a form of idolatry, is forbidden by the first commandment.

“Other gods” can also include anything that robs us of our reverence of Almighty God, such as: obsession with money; being married to one’s work or TV, computers, cell phones, and social media; celebrity gossip; pornography; or alcohol, drug, and sex abuse. All of these can become gods to us **in that our world CENTRES around them**. In the same way, any hobby, relationship, person, or any thing that comes before – or between – you and Jesus Christ in your earthly life is a god. Literally anything that occupies you and your time more than God does – **including being self-absorbed** – is a god. Therefore, as St. Paul urges us (1 Corinthians 10:31):

“Whatsoever you do, do it all to the glory of God.”



The Second Commandment (Exodus 20:4-6):

“Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image, nor the likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down to them, nor worship them.

For I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, and visit the sins of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me, and show mercy unto thousands in them that love me and keep my commandments.”

This commandment has a lot to do with the first commandment, in that it deals with the **things we worship**. As such, this commandment forbids **idolatry** (such as: worshipping statues of Caesar; making golden calves; or building temples to Artemis for example). While we may not have actual carved stone idols, whatever it is that we build up to be more important than God in our lives puts us at risk for the same sort of idolatry. This could be as simple as: building up a

collection of something that becomes our primary focus; or spending too much time on social media, cell phones, computers, or TV; or worshipping human idols like athletes, movie stars, or musicians. Similarly, it is forbidden to worship any creature, image, or picture **even one that we imagine in our minds**. Also, the spiritual importance of the second commandment extends even further, as it forbids participation in every kind of superstition, black arts, or witchcraft, in addition to using mere human inventions (such as non-Holy Scripture-based traditions) in the worship of Almighty God.



The Third Commandment (Exodus 20:7):

“Thou shalt not take the Name of the LORD thy God in vain: for the LORD will not hold him guiltless, that taketh his Name in vain.”

This commandment demands that the faithful **are to HONOUR the name of God**. It only makes sense that if we are to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, then, naturally, we are to respect the name of God with equal passion and vigour. Hence, if we curse using God’s name – which does not only mean using the Lord’s name in a profane way, but also includes using it casually (as in the ever popular text acronym “OMG”) – or if we insult what is Holy and perfect in His eyes, we have broken the third commandment. All false oaths sworn in God’s name and all informal appealing to the name of God are similarly forbidden. Religious hypocrisy, especially, is a horrid breach of this commandment, as is praying and worshipping God without serious, reverent, and sincere faith (for Satan’s plan is to see as often as possible God’s name stumbled and maligned to the lowest degree). Indeed, as the Psalmist exhorts us (Psalm 96:9):

“Worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth.”



The Fourth Commandment (Exodus 20:8-11):

“Remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath day. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all that thou hast to do; but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD thy God.

In it thou shalt do no manner of work, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, thy man-servant, and thy maid-servant, thy cattle, and the stranger that is within thy gates. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it.”

Whether you have never kept the Sabbath day – or **have failed to keep it just ONE time** – you have broken the fourth commandment. The Jewish celebration of Sabbath or “Shabbat” begins at sundown on Friday evening and lasts until sundown on Saturday evening. In the meantime, Anglican, Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox Christians tend to go to church on Sunday (rather than Saturday), treating it as the “Lord’s Day”, in honour of the first Easter Day when Jesus Christ rose from the dead. Be that as it may, the Sabbath should be **one day of rest per week** from worldly labour. However, our Lord Jesus Christ made allowances for works of necessity, charity, and piety to be done on the Sabbath day when He said (St. Mark 2:27):

“The Sabbath day was made for man and not man for the Sabbath.”

Conversely, all works of luxury, vanity, or self-indulgence **in any form** are strictly forbidden. Likewise, trading, paying wages, settling accounts, writing letters of business, worldly studies, travelling, social visits, journeys, or frivolous conversation are not in the spirit of keeping the Sabbath day **holy**. All the same, even though working on the “primary” Sabbath day (that is, Sunday) is generally discouraged, there are certain people who are required to work on that day for

society's well-being, such as: healthcare professionals; firefighters; emergency personnel; police officers; and clergy. This one particular commandment is "interpreted" many different ways, but, ultimately, it comes down to asking ourselves:

- ☞ **"Does what I'm doing detract - in any way - from the holiness of the 'Lord's day'?"**
- ☞ **"Is what I'm doing absolutely necessary?"**
- ☞ **"Does doing it keep my mind focused on what Almighty God has done for me?"**

If the answer to any of these questions is "no", then it is probably not a good Sabbath day activity. On the other hand worthwhile Sabbath day activities would include: attending church; praying; reading the Bible (or some other inspirational book); spending time with family; visiting the sick or lonely; going for a nature walk; or writing personal letters (to name a few).



Next Sunday, we will continue with our in-depth examination of the Ten Commandments, by focusing on the first three of those which pertain to loving "our neighbour".

Until then, let us earnestly strive over the coming week to follow all ten to the best of our ability, never once looking upon them - even remotely - as "suggestions" or "recommendations".



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