



THE MISSION OF SAINT MARY MAGDALENE

Father Alan's Blog for the Fourth Sunday in Lent March 27, 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)

On pages 89-90 of its January 1996 issue, *Reader's Digest* reprinted the following article by Debra McGrath-Kerr and Dick Sheridan, reporters with the *New York Daily News*:

"Mary Ann Dennis was walking her bull mastiff, Buz, in New York City's Riverside Park when an elderly man told her, 'That guy robbed me!' The suspect, in black jeans and tank top, was fleeing. Dennis urged the victim to help her follow the robber, but the man couldn't run. So, five-foot-two Dennis went it alone. With Dennis and Buz in pursuit, the suspect raced out of the park, ran one block, and hailed a cab. 'I was screaming and waving my hands,' Dennis says, 'but a taxi picked him up.'

"Dennis kept running. Just as she was losing hope, a white van pulled up beside her. After she explained the situation, the driver said, 'Get in!' When they caught up with the cab, its passenger was gone. The cabby told Dennis the man had fled toward Broadway. She and Buz picked up the chase on foot. Spotting her quarry hopping

into another cab, Dennis leaped in front of it shouting, 'Stop! That man robbed somebody!' The thief jumped out and threatened Dennis, before running to a third taxi. Dennis jumped in front of it just before the traffic light changed. Within moments, the police arrived and handcuffed the suspect, who was charged with third-degree robbery and criminal possession of stolen property.

"Would Mary Ann Dennis do it again? Without hesitation she replied, 'Definitely! Jesus said, "Love your neighbor as yourself." If the whole world lived that way, this wouldn't be such a cold place.'"



As I mentioned last week, today we will continue with our in-depth examination of the Ten Commandments, focusing on the first three of the six that pertain to loving "our neighbour".

But first – who, exactly, is "our neighbour"?

Through His telling of "The Parable of the Good Samaritan" (St. Luke 10:25-37), our Lord Jesus Christ provides us with the answer. For our purposes today (and because it is such a well-known passage of Holy Scripture), I'll just give a brief summary:

- ☞ **A man is travelling on a dangerous road when he is attacked by robbers, stripped, beaten, and left for dead. Two men, a priest and a Levite, each, in turn, happen upon the wounded man (that is, two people who – especially because they are "church people" – we believe should care for this man, but do not). Then, another man, a Samaritan, comes by (that is, a man who – because he is "a hated enemy" – we believe should not care for this man, but does). With the point being that God expects us not only to *care* for our neighbour, but to *see as* our neighbour anyone who is in need. The priest and the Levite**

do not see the injured man as a neighbour, but as *a burden* – as something that will keep them from accomplishing whatever task or duty that has placed them on this road in the first place. Conversely, the Samaritan (unmindful of his initial task and despite whatever time pressures he may be feeling), sees this man in need as *a person* – as a child of God, as someone who inherently deserves his time and his attention.

Indeed, as Martin Luther King Jr. once wrote:

“The first question which the priest and the Levite asked was: ‘If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?’ But, the good Samaritan reversed the question: ‘If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?’”

Thus, I think we would each be well-advised to take a long, hard look at precisely who we see as our neighbour, and who we overlook. For, in many ways, we are just as clan-oriented, just as insular as those in Jesus’ original audience. Because, most often, we look out first for our immediate family, and then our extended family, and then our close friends, and then those who are most like us (or who share our beliefs, values, or associations). Like the priest and the Levite, then, we tend to overlook and to avoid those who are different from us. Yet our Triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – calls us to more: because He purposely created **ALL people** in His image. Moreover, the Lord Jesus Christ willingly died to save **ALL people** from the eternal penalty of their sins (that is, **spiritual death**). Therefore, both of God’s mighty acts (of creation and of redemption) signify that at the heart of Christianity is the belief that **ALL people have inherent worth and dignity – PERIOD.**

This is a most valuable and timely message to share with everyone we know – especially our immediate family, our extended family, our close friends, and those who are most like us (or who share our beliefs, values, or associations). Because, day by day, our schools, our

communities, our nation, and our world are becoming increasingly diverse. As a result, we are more likely than ever to run into people who look different, or who believe differently, or who observe different cultural customs than we do: hence, the importance that we, as Christians, place on our Lord's definition and treatment of a neighbour – that is, any other human being, male or female, irrespective of nation or religion, with whom we live or who we chance to meet, and to that neighbour to be merciful and to show love like we want to be loved (or like we love ourselves) – is more crucial than ever. It is also the reason why we are taking the time this Lent to study God's Ten Commandments (as found in Exodus 20:1-17) in general, and why we are taking the time today and next week (the Fourth and Fifth Sundays in Lent) to examine the six commandments that deal with loving "our neighbour" in particular (remembering that, as I mentioned earlier, we will focus today on the first three of those six commandments).



The Fifth Commandment (Exodus 20:12):

"Honour thy father and thy mother; that thy days may be long in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee."

As St. Paul (in borrowing from Deuteronomy 5:16) notes in Ephesians 6:2b-3 this commandment:

"...is the first (one) with a promise – 'that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.'"

The Fifth Commandment obliges believers – both as children and as adults – to show respect for their parents. First, children should honour their parents because they owe their birth to them, and, subsequently, as they grow, children continually receive nourishment

from their parents. Moreover, specifically because we receive nourishment from our parents during our childhood, as adults, therefore, we should respect and support our parents by seeing to their full and proper care when they become old and infirm.

This thought is neither radical nor new, as Cassiodorus (a Roman statesman, writer, and monk (490 AD – c. 585 AD) related the following story – one he had personally witnessed from nature:

“Young storks, when the parents have lost their feathers by approaching old age, and are unable to find suitable food, make the parent storks comfortable with their own feathers and bring back food for their worn-out bodies. Thus, by this affectionate exchange, the young ones repay the parents for what they received when they were young.”

However, it ought to go far beyond that; we should honour the hard work and the sacrifices of our ancestors for all that they made possible for us. Likewise, we should also honour all those who nurture us and who teach us as parents would.

Second, because children receive instruction from their parents, they ought to honour their parents by obeying them – with the exception, of course, of those things which are contrary either to God’s teaching or His will. For as our Lord Jesus Christ cautioned (St. Luke 14:26):

“If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters – yes, even their own life – such a person cannot be my disciple.”

Jesus pressed home to His followers that no love of home or of family (that is no **earthly** affection) must ever come into competition with the love of God. In other words, if home (and all that it entails) ever came into collision with following God’s plan for us in Jesus Christ, then (for our eternal well-being), home, everything belonging to it, and all else must be sacrificed.



The Sixth Commandment (Exodus 20:13):

“Thou shalt do no murder.”

This commandment is sometimes translated from the original Hebrew as, “Thou shalt not kill.” However, the best translation is, “Thou shalt not murder” or, as above, “Thou shalt do no murder” – a subtle distinction, but, nevertheless, an important one to the Church.

Whereas the premeditated killing of an innocent person is murder, the killing of an unjust aggressor to preserve one’s own life or well-being (such as killing an enemy during wartime, for instance) is considered to be neither murder nor immoral. All the same, included in the Sixth Commandment are the kind of things (besides a human life) that can be “cut short in their prime” [for example, when we intentionally (or in a pre-meditated fashion) engage in any behaviour that diminishes someone else’s spirit, or destroys their feelings, or confidence, or sense of self-worth, or dreams]. Furthermore, if we harbour feelings of anger or bitterness, or if we hold grudges toward anyone, or if we abuse, or quarrel and fight with any person, we are guilty of breaking this commandment.



The Seventh Commandment (Exodus 20:14):

“Thou shalt not commit adultery.”

By honouring human sexuality (which is a gift from God, divinely intended to be expressed through the marital union of one man with one woman), the Seventh Commandment primarily forbids the physical act of engaging in “infidelity” (voluntary sexual intercourse between a married person and a person who is not his or her spouse).

For as Jacob's son, Joseph, professed in Egypt (Genesis 39:9), adultery, in addition to being a sin against the marriage partner, **is a sin against God**. Thus, our Lord Jesus Christ spoke to the spirit – as opposed to the letter – of the Law when He taught (St. Matthew 5:27-28):

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

In short, therefore, adultery first happens in the heart, in the mind, and in the soul long before the body engages in it. Furthermore, this commandment is also intended to include any immoral sexual activity such as fornication (which is sex between unmarried people) or prostitution, or the making or viewing of pornography, or sexual violence or abuse of any kind, or homosexual activity, and so on.

Accordingly, St. Paul urged (1 Corinthians 6:28-30):

“Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.”

Finally, as we touched on last week, the worship of other gods (or even just being involved with exploring other gods) is a form of spiritual prostitution or adultery.



Next Sunday, we will continue with our in-depth examination of the Ten Commandments, by focusing on the final three of the six commandments that pertain to loving “our neighbour”.

In the meantime, let us truly strive over the coming week to follow (with God's help) our Lord Jesus Christ's "prime directive" -

☞ **To love God and to love our neighbour -**

firm in the belief that:

"If the whole world lived that way, this wouldn't be such a cold place."



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