

22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday per Annum - B  
Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-8;  
James 1:17-18, 21b-22, 27;  
Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23  
Little Flower - 9/1/24

My Brothers and Sisters,

For the last several weeks, our Gospels have focused on Jesus' gift of himself in his Word and in the Eucharist. Last week's second reading focused on Jesus' gift of himself in the sacrament of matrimony, his embodied presence and love in the love of Christian husbands and wives for each other. Today's readings focus on us and our response to God's love.

When God offered the Israelites the Covenant on Mount Sinai, God promised two things. He would make the Israelites a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people set apart, and he would give them the Promised Land. For their part, they were to keep the Ten Commandments.

In today's first reading, *"Moses said to the people, 'Now, Israel, hear the statutes and decrees which I am teaching you to observe, that you may live, and may enter in and take possession of the land which the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you.'"* In effect, Moses was telling the people that their individual lives and their life as a nation depended on them keeping the Ten Commandments. Although the Ten Commandments were the commandments of the Old Covenant, they are perennially valid.

You may have seen a billboard or a bumper sticker that said, "God did not give the Ten Suggestions." Today I fear that many people treat the Ten Commandments as the Ten Suggestions. I would suggest that the Ten Commandments are as important for our lives and our society as they were for the lives and society of the Israelites. To understand their importance for society, we need to understand that God created us social, God created us to live in community. Let me give two examples.

The fifth commandment is "Thou shalt not kill." We are familiar with societies and cultures that do not respect human life, and we see the consequences of this every time we watch the evening news. We have seen the consequences of lack of respect for life in the number of murders committed here in Indianapolis, many of them on the Eastside. We should, therefore, understand the Church's insistence on respect for all human life from the moment of conception to the moment of natural death.

The sixth commandment is "Thou shalt not commit adultery." We have seen the consequences of the failure to keep the sixth commandment in the breakdown of marriage and family in our society. Estimates of divorce suggest that at least 50% of all marriages end in divorce. Long-term studies of children of divorce suggest that they will struggle more than their peers. The same studies also suggest that children of divorce are more likely to live in poverty than children in intact two-parent families.

The reality is that when the Ten Commandments are systematically violated, both individuals and society suffer. For example, when people are afraid to leave their homes, real community is not possible. When people cannot trust their partners and other people to respect their marriage commitment, it destroys the trust that makes community possible.

My brothers and sisters, religious people are sometimes tempted to be more concerned with external religious practices than with goodness of heart and behavior. In today's Gospel, Jesus warns us that good and evil come from within our hearts. In his letter to all Christians, St. James reminds us that true religion is not measured primarily by religious practices:

*Be doers of the word and not hearers only. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained by the world.*

As Christians, it is important that we live the Ten Commandments, but it is equally important that we do positive good for others and society.