3rd Sunday of Lent Year C

On the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Sundays of Lent in Years B and C, the readings from year A may be used. Our commentary will use the scriptures for Year B.

Exodus 20:1-17

In Chapter 19 Moses ordered the Israelites to wash and abstain from sex for three days as outward signs of purification and separation from earthly activities. They got nervous when Moses told them not to touch the mountain lest they die. On the third day the mountain began to quake, smoke and fire poured forth, thunder crashed, lightning flashed and a loud trumpet blared out of nowhere! Then…

1. In those days, This is the time when God had drawn his people out of bondage in Egypt, which is symbolic of their bondage in sin. Having given them physical freedom from the Egyptians, he now reminds them of their moral freedom and commands behavior in keeping with the dignity of human freedom. God delivered all these Commandments: He says in effect, "You have clearly forgotten that there are certain rules that we follow in this family. Let me remind you that…" And then follows the house rules. God reminds Israel that as the Head of all the tribes, He ought to be treated properly (Commandments 1-3). He then reminds them of the way they should treat their earthly parents (Commandment 4). Finally, He reminds them that they owe their brothers and sisters a certain respect too (Commandments 5-10). It is in the New Covenant in Jesus Christ that their full meaning will be revealed. Stone tablets don't come until Ex 31:18.
2. "I, the Lord, am your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that place of slavery.
3. You shall not have other gods besides me. The recognition of one God was intended to distinguish Israel from her neighbors who all boasted a host of heavenly deities. This seems strange to our culture because we don't have a lot of recognizable gods but we do have things that we give preference to over God. There is a document from the Holy See called "Jesus Christ, Bearer of Living Water: A Christian Reflection on the New Age" that denounces the "New Age" movement. It speaks out against the "enneagram," various forms of "channeling" and "dream-analysis," "journaling," yoga, massage, and some healing therapies. For the New Age salvation is a personal achievement—"self-fulfillment, self-realization, self-redemption," but for Christians, salvation depends on a participation in the Passion, death, and Resurrection of Christ, and on a direct, personal relationship with God rather than on any technique.
4. You shall not carve idols for yourselves in the shape of anything in the sky above or on the earth below or in the waters beneath the earth; The neighbors of the Israelites carved idols and many have been found but NO images of Yahweh have been found in all the scientifically excavated biblical sites. The reason that we now have pictures and statues is that once Jesus became man, he had a form. At the Seventh Council at Nicaea in 787, the Church ruled that we could have reverential respect for icons of Christ, Mary, the angels and all the Saints. The Catechism tells us that whoever venerates an image venerates (honors, not worships) the person portrayed in it.
5. you shall not bow down before them or worship them. The point here is that there is only one true God and he cannot abide the worship of other gods nor of idols, whether this worship be of gods or demons (Satanism), power, pleasure, race, ancestors, the state, money, etc. Such idolatry is the gravest and most condemned sin in the Bible. For I, the Lord, your God, am a jealous God, inflicting punishment for their fathers' wickedness on the children of those who hate me, down to the third and fourth generation;
6. but bestowing mercy down to the thousandth generation on the children of those who love me and keep my commandments.
7. You shall not take the name of the Lord, your God, in vain. This is the Second Commandment. Among all the words of Revelation, there is one which is unique: the revealed name of God. God

confides his name to those who believe in Him. The gift of a name belongs to the order of trust and intimacy. The Lord's name is holy. For this reason man must not abuse it. He must keep it in mind in silent, loving adoration. He must not introduce it into his own speech except to bless, praise and glorify it. Respect for God's name is respect for God himself. His Name is not to be taken in vain as at a trial by committing perjury, nor is it to be used to support curses or magical formulas. This Commandment also forbids blasphemy, which means to utter words of hatred, reproach or defiance against God, to speak ill of Him, to fail in respect toward Him or in any way misusing the names of God and the Catechism includes Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary or any of the Saints. For the Lord will not leave unpunished the one who takes his name in vain!

8. Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day. This is the Third Commandment. It orders the worship of God. Commandments One and Two remove the obstacles to this worship. One obstacle to worship is error: worshiping false gods. COMMANDMENT ONE REMOVES THIS ERROR. The second obstacle to worship is irreverence—to know there is a one, true God, yet to deny Him worship by bandying His name about as if He didn't exist. COMMANDMENT TWO REMOVES SUCH IRREVERENCE: "Thou shalt not take God's name in vain." This Third Commandment recalls the holiness of the Sabbath. The Catholic Church specifies that on Sundays and other holy days of obligation, the faithful are bound to participate in the Mass, which is the source and summit of the Christian life. THOSE WHO DELIBERATELY FAIL IN THIS OBLIGATION COMMIT A GRAVE SIN. Furthermore, the faithful are to refrain from engaging in work or activities that hinder the worship owed to God. Sunday is traditionally consecrated to good works and humble service of the sick, the infirm, and the elderly. We are also called to devote time and care to our families and relatives whom we may have trouble seeing the rest of the week.

9. Six days you may labor and do all your work,

10. but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord, your God. No work may be done then either by you, or your son or daughter, or your male or female slave, or your beast, or by the alien who lives with you.

11. In six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them; but on the seventh day he rested. That is why the Lord has blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. This has been replaced by Sundays because that is the day on which Jesus rose from the dead.

12. Honor your father and your mother, that you may have a long life in the land which the Lord, your God, is giving you. This is the first Commandment with a promise. Respecting this Commandment provides, along with spiritual fruits, temporal fruits of peace and prosperity. Conversely, failure to observe it brings great harm to communities and to individuals. The fact that this Commandment comes immediately after the precepts that refer to God shows its importance. Parents, in effect, represent God within the family circle. According to the Fourth Commandment, children are obliged to love, respect and obey their parents in all things except sin. They also have an obligation to help their parents in the hardships and loneliness of old age and when they are sick or helpless and also to pray for them. Children must also honor and obey teachers and others in authority. Parents, on the other hand, must look after the spiritual and temporal welfare of their children; teach them Christian virtues by word and example; be patient with them, correct them wisely; demand their respect and obedience. All Catholics are obliged to honor and obey the authorities of the Church and all civil authorities and laws that are not in conflict with the law of God.

13. You shall not kill. The Fifth Commandment protects the sacredness of human life while it forbids all willful murders, fighting, hatred, revenge, drunkenness, scandal and bad example, as well as refusing assistance to a person in danger. Life is something that belongs to God alone. The following are serious sins against this commandment: murder, abortion, suicide, euthanasia, sterilization, and serious abuse of alcohol or other drugs.

14. You shall not commit adultery. The sanctity of marriage is protected by the Sixth Commandment which also encompasses the whole of human sexuality. Only husbands and wives who are validly married and are acting according to God's holy plans may engage in acts and pleasures of sex. Serious sins against the Sixth Commandment are adultery, fornication, lust, rape, masturbation, incest, and homosexual acts. We are commanded to be pure in our thoughts, words and actions. There can be no premarital sex as well as no pornography or indecent entertainment of every description.
15. You shall not steal. This Commandment condemns the abducting of persons in order to sell them into slavery, trade in human embryos, the taking of hostages and racial segregation. Of course, we must respect the private property of others. We are forbidden to take what rightly belongs to another. Promises must be kept and contracts strictly observed. Some other sins against the Seventh Commandment are: theft, burglary and fraud, deliberately damaging another's property, failure to pay a just debt or obligation, neglecting to help the poor or those in need, greediness and making material wealth a ruling part of one's life, excessive gambling and failure to return what has been found or borrowed. The wasting of time, money or property of an employer is also wrong as is the failure of the employer to pay employees a just wage.
16. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. The Eighth Commandment says that care must be taken not to say anything to damage another's reputation and that it is wrong to judge another person without sufficient evidence. Gossip, insults and unjust criticism, lying, false witness and perjury are some wrongs we can commit against our neighbor.
17. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male or female slave, nor his ox or ass, nor anything else that belongs to him." Coveting is a cancer in the heart robbing a person of joy and contentment, poisoning relationships. It is that deep self-centeredness that ruthlessly seeks what it wants regardless of the needs and rights of others. God cares for both our outward behavior and our inner health and character. The Ninth Commandment, like the Sixth, concerns the virtue of chastity. Willful consent to impure thoughts or desires is forbidden. The struggle against lust involves purifying the heart. The Tenth Commandment concerns respect for the property of others and forbids greed and the desire to amass earthly goods without limit. We must not be envious of things that belong to others, their success or good fortune. The Lord grieves over the rich, because they find their consolation in the abundance of goods and not in HIM. When Moses came to the people and related all the words and ordinances of the Lord, they all answered with one voice, "We will do everything that the Lord has told us."(Ex. 24:3)

This Decalogue (Greek for "ten words") is a summary of duties toward God and neighbor that has been the foundation of all Jewish and Christian instruction since the calling of Israel as the chosen people. It is one of the most sacred and honored and widely known of all texts. It has survived as one of the most complete guides to human behavior ever formulated. St. Thomas points out that "all the precepts of the natural law are contained in the Decalogue." In other words, FIRST GOD WROTE THE COMMANDMENTS ON OUR HEARTS and then He wrote them in stone. The Commandments are divided in two different ways: Jews and some Christians divide the first Commandment into two whereas Catholics and Lutherans follow St. Augustine and make it just one and divide into two the last Commandment. The Commandments are also listed in Deuteronomy 5:6-21 and in that list "wife" comes before "goods" which has become the way we write them.

1 Corinthians 1:22-25

Brothers and sisters:

22. Jews demand signs The Jews wanted to base their faith on things the senses could perceive. In some way they imposed limits as to how God could reveal himself and how he could not. and Greeks look for wisdom, Israel expected outstanding miracles (signs) from the Messiah to authenticate his mission and the Hellenistic thinkers were always on the lookout for new and compelling explanations of the universe (wisdom), but they are both equally disappointed by St. Paul's preaching of Christ crucified. For all its wisdom, the world can't find God. That search is designed by God to show our helplessness and to get us ready to accept Him. Today, the Good News of Jesus Christ still sounds foolish to some people. Our society worships youth, influence, wealth, power, and health. Jesus came as a humble, poor servant and he offers his kingdom to those with faith, not talent, money or power. To the world this method looks backward, but it is the way God chose to save it!

23. but we proclaim Christ crucified, Roman crucifixion was normally a sign of disgrace and defeat for its victims. The crucifixion of Christ, however, was a deathblow to the devil and the means of our salvation. stumbling block to Jews For some Jews crucifixion was connected with the curse of God in Deuteronomy 21: "If a man guilty of a capital offense is put to death and his corpse hung on a tree, it shall not remain on the tree overnight. You shall bury it the same day; otherwise, since God's curse rests on him who hangs on a tree, you will defile the land which the Lord, your God, is giving you as an inheritance." Paul deals with this apparent difficulty in Galatians where he insists that Christ endured the curse of death so that Israel and the Gentiles could be blessed with new life. and foolishness to Gentiles, God chose the Cross over signs and wisdom because Christ came to reveal the love of the Father. Men expected power and wisdom from God. They never expected love!

24. but to those who are called, Jews and Greeks alike, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. Christ reveals power and wisdom but through the weakness and folly of sacrificial love.

25. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

John 2:13-25

There is a break today in our reading of the Gospel of Mark for this selection from John who puts the cleansing of the temple at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. The other gospels present this event as occurring later. The reason is probably that John wants to reveal the ultimate mission of Jesus early on. Jesus' prediction of his own resurrection is indirect and misunderstood by those who heard it but the commentary supplied by John ("Actually, he was talking about the temple of his body") rids the passage of any vagueness for the reader. And he asserts that the disciples understood the reference as well, but only after the resurrection. The time of today's reading is two years before Jesus' passion, death and resurrection. This is his first trip to Jerusalem and the Temple since the start of his public ministry.

13. Since the Passover of the Jews was near, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. The Passover was the most important religious feast for the people of the Old Testament. It memorialized the painting of the doorway with the blood of the lamb so that the angel of death "passed over" the homes so marked when carrying out the plague of killing the first born when they were slaves in Egypt. According to the law, it was obligatory for every male Jew who lived within twenty miles of Jerusalem to attend the feast.

14. He found in the temple area those who sold oxen, sheep and doves, as well as the moneychangers seated there. People traveled from great distances to celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem. An ox or a sheep was offered if a person were wealthy and two doves if they were not. Instead of dragging sacrificial animals along with them, they purchased them in Jerusalem. Many varieties of coin would be brought to Jerusalem to buy animals and to pay the Temple tax, (which was required of all Jews over 19 years of age) but only special Temple currency was allowed. Any currency with the image of a foreign sovereign would defile the Temple. Money-changers were there to exchange currency which they apparently did without always being honest for Mark 11:17 tells us that they had turned the Temple area into "a den of thieves." The outer courts of the Temple were reserved for non-Jews so they could worship God, for the Jews were to be a light to draw all nations to the God of Israel. Instead, they turned the outer courts into a manure-filled noisy market place. Those who were to be drawn to prayer were instead crowded out and pushed away from God. Origen comments that Jesus always begins by reforming abuses and purifying from sin; both when he visits the Temple and when he visits the Christian soul.
15. He made a whip out of cords This is the only thing that we are ever told that Jesus made. and drove them all out of the temple area, Surely it was not the scourge of little cords or even the muscles made strong by twenty years of carpentry that drove the men and animals out of the Temple courtyard. It must have been something in the personality or in the eyes, otherwise he would have been beaten to the ground in the first few minutes and the money-changing and the animal-selling would have gone on with hardly an interruption. with the sheep and oxen, and spilled the coins of the moneychangers and overturned their tables, The aggressive actions of Jesus are a prophetic sign of the Temple's imminent destruction. The expulsion of oxen, sheep, and pigeons from the precincts likewise signifies the termination of animal sacrifice in the Temple.
16. and to those who sold doves he said, "Take these out of here, and stop making my Father's house a marketplace." Here Jesus refers to the Temple as his Father's house which shows that he is the Messiah, the Owner's Son, but the Jews thought he was blaspheming because they saw him as only a man making himself out to be god. Allegorically, Origen refers to the sanctuary as the undisciplined soul that is filled, not with animals and merchants, but with earthly and senseless attachments. Christ must expel them to make spiritual worship possible.
17.His disciples recalled the words of Scripture, "Zeal for your house will consume me." The remembered scripture is from Psalm 69 which depicts the suffering of the righteous, who are pained by the insults that sinners heap upon God.
18.At this the Jews answered and said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" The Jews mentioned here were actually the religious authorities in Jerusalem. It is interesting that they did not try to arrest Jesus at this time. All they did was ask him what miracle he could offer as evidence of his right to do this. Christ's actions were actually a sign in themselves for they fulfilled the prophecy in Mal. 3:1-3: "And suddenly there will come to the Temple the Lord whom you seek…But who will endure the day of his coming? And who can stand when he appears? For he is like the refiner's fire or like the fuller's lye. He will sit refining and purifying and he will purify the sons of Levi, refining them like gold or like silver that they may offer due sacrifice to the Lord."
19.Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." Jesus challenges his critics to destroy, not the sacred building, but his own body. Ironically, the latter is destined to replace the former: after the Crucifixion, the Temple of Jerusalem will be razed to the ground in divine judgment while the temple of Jesus' body will be raised from the grave in divine glory.
20.The Jews said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, Solomon's Temple, built about 740 B.C., was destroyed by Babylon in 587 B.C. and rebuilt by the prophet Nehemiah after the exile about 520 B.C. This second Temple was besieged by Pompey in 63 B.C. Herod

began construction of the Third Temple in 19 B.C. which was finally completed in 64 A.D., six years before its destruction. It was leveled by Emperor Titus in 70 A.D. This last Temple was in the process of being built during the life of Jesus. The Western Wall ("Wailing Wall") is all that remains of the Temple today. and you will raise it up in three days?" The Jews take Jesus' words literally—words that at his trial were misstated as a threat that he would himself destroy the Temple.
21.But he was speaking about the temple of his body.
22.Therefore, when he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they came to believe the Scripture and the word Jesus had spoken. The full significance of the words and deeds of Jesus was only understood in the light of the resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit.
23.While he was in Jerusalem for the feast of Passover, many began to believe in his name when they saw the signs he was doing. In Semitic usage the "name" is equivalent to the person. Faith is not simply the acceptance of a proposition, it is commitment to a person.
24.But Jesus would not trust himself to them because he knew them all,
25. and did not need anyone to testify about human nature. He himself understood it well. Being truly man but endowed with the wisdom of God, Jesus labors under no illusions concerning human frailty. He detects deficient faith in those who marvel at his miracles but fail to grasp the significance of his mission. Since the faith of the multitudes was based on seeing, it was very weak.

Some of the material for this commentary is taken from: (1) The Commentary Notes of Tim Gray, (2) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 1997" by Lawrence E. Mick, (3) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers:2003" by Aelred R. Rosser, (4) "The Jerome Biblical Commentary," (5) Vatican Document: "Jesus Christ, Bearer of Living Water: A Christian Reflection on the New Age" published in Feb., 2003, (6) "Catechism Of The Catholic Church," (7) "The Navarre Bible: Pentateuch," (8) "Exodus: Road to Freedom" by Fr. Albert Joseph Mary Shamon, (9) "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The First and Second Letters of Saint Paul to the Corinthians," With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (10) "The Navarre Bible: Corinthians," (11) "The Letters To The Corinthians" by William Barclay, (12) "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of John," With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (13) "The Gospel Of John" by William Barclay, (14) "The Navarre Bible: St. John," (15) "Catholic Bible Study: John" by Stephen K. Ray, (16) "To Know Christ Jesus" by Frank Sheed, and (17) The St. Paul Center For Biblical Theology Founded By Dr. Scott Hahn.

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.