

Lent III
3/7/2021

DIVINE JEALOUSY

For I the Lord your God, am a jealous God. As a child and as an adult, I remembered hearing the word jealous applied to God and struggling to understand that. Isn't jealousy a vice? Isn't envy one of the seven deadly sins? How can God, goodness itself, be jealous?

To give some context, it helps to understand that the Israelites left Egypt, a land with many different gods. One author has noted that this "jealousy" of God is a declaration that only God is God. Jealousy may be translated as, "impassioned." God possesses a deep, passionate love for Israel and that not only punishes sin but wants the best for Israel. Human jealousy can arise out of selfishness but divine jealousy expresses God's love. This all emphasizes that the trust of Israel is to be in God and God alone.

Human laws may express injustice but God's commandments always express God's love. What God commands is for our own good or as our Psalm today tells us, The law of the Lord refreshes the soul. It has been noted that other ancient laws would see violations of a law as a crime against one's neighbor but now such violations are also seen as a crime against God. Murder, adultery, lying, stealing and all the rest offend our neighbor but also offend God.

God's commandments aren't given to impinge on our freedom or cramp our style. They are given to allow us to become who we are meant to be, to become the best version of ourselves, to allow us to grow in the freedom of the children of God. These ten expressions of God's love, these ten guideposts exist to help keep us on the straight and narrow way that leads to eternal life. Sometimes the Ten Commandments are divided among the first three that have to do with God and the last seven that have to do with our neighbor. Sometimes they can be divided between the first eight which have to do with our actions and the last two that have to do with our thoughts. While the first commandment is obviously the most important, that doesn't mean the other nine don't matter. Many years ago I saw a poster that said, *The Ten Commandments aren't multiple choice.*

All this being said, there's another prism through which we can see that the Ten Commandments and that's through Number 8, not bearing false witness which more positively means respecting truth. The first point in respecting truth is to admit that truth, objective truth exists, and that alone can put you against some of our culture. There is objective truth and it is not just what we want it to be. Jesus says, *I am the truth* and he also says, *the truth will set you free*. Once we accept that there is truth, we can see that *each of the Ten Commandments seeks to protect truth and that a violation of a commandment is a violation of truth*.

To worship other gods includes the worship of money, power, sports, prestige, pleasure and so many other things, violates the truth that God is God. The same holds true for misusing God's name or the Sabbath. To disrespect our parents is to deny the truth of the role given them by God. To disrespect human life or human sexuality is to deny the truth of what these are as intended by God. To disrespect what pertains to others by actions or by thoughts is to ignore the truth of who they are. Simply put, to break a commandment, and sin itself, is to break a truth of who our neighbor is, of who we are and of who God is.

Now we jump ahead a few centuries to today's gospel. People at that time used the Roman coinage for daily use which couldn't be used in the temple hence the need for people to exchange money. Jesus finds this all inappropriate to the sacred nature of the temple and drives them out. Psalm 69 is quoted that says, *Zeal for your house will consume me*. Zeal has the same root as jealousy. The divine jealousy or passionate commitment we find in the first reading is repeated now by Jesus. But Jesus does more than drive out people and animals from the temple. He speaks of himself as the temple.

Ultimately, the building of the temple, the place where people encountered God was to be replaced with the temple of Jesus body as now it is in him that we encounter God. One author has observed that sacrificial animals would no longer be necessary because of the sacrifice Jesus would make of himself, the sacrifice *of the new and eternal covenant*. As we say at every Mass, Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Jesus is the sacrifice that is offered, he is the temple where this takes place and he is the priest who makes the sacrifice of himself.

This all expresses divine zeal, God's jealousy, God's impassioned commitment to us. It calls us to respond with a certain type of jealousy, not a sinful jealousy but

for an impassioned commitment to not let anything take the place of God in our lives, to not let anything take the place of truth; an impassioned commitment to love God in our neighbor and to love our neighbor in God. It calls for us to make an offering of ourselves in love with and in Jesus to God and for others.

St. Benedict spoke of bad zeal and good zeal. Bad zeal separates from God and leads to hell. It can be described as a misplaced or an angry or even fanatical zeal that in the extreme leads to violence and acts of terrorism. Good zeal by contrast separates us from vice and leads to God. It calls us to honor others, to be patient with others and their weaknesses, to practice charity and to prefer nothing to Christ.

May we give thanks to God for his impassioned, jealous love for us, the zeal that led Jesus to suffer, die and rise for us. The Eucharist is a school of good zeal where we enter into the one sacrifice of Christ who is offered, who offers himself and who is where we now encounter God and his loving mercy. Here in the Eucharist, informed by the word of God, nourished by Jesus, truly present in the Eucharist and encouraged by one another we strive to live lives of intentional faith in every little way.

As Jesus purified the temple, so may he purify our hearts. May we respond to him who first loved us embracing the Ten Commandments as expressions of his love given to us for our own good and our own happiness. May a spark of not human jealousy but rather divine jealousy, of good zeal, of passionate commitment, grow within us this Lent and always.