

Church of the Good Shepherd  
and  
St. John the Evangelist

3 Lent  
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Fr. Bill McGinty

**“Becoming a Builder”**

Already we are halfway through Lent. It is time to ask ourselves ‘how we are doing?’ Lent truly is a time for reflection and a time to evaluate ourselves and our Christian calling.

Lent is designed to slow us down, to a pace where we can hear God speaking to us. From time to time Jesus in the Gospel takes his disciples to a quiet place. It is always an intimate setting, where he talks to them quietly.

But the stunning reading today comes from the book of Exodus. Here God gives to Moses his 10 Commandments. The Jews called it Decalogue, meaning the 10 words that were given one for each commandment.

Thirty-three hundred years later millions of people still hold true to these commands and accept them as their moral code.

The code translates into every facet of life. It contains universal principles which transcend time and national barriers. To walk through God’s Code is to see it in a larger context that just a list of do’s and don’ts. The code is God’s demands for Israel to obey in the great Covenant he has just made with her.

“You will be my chosen people and I will be your God, if you keep my Commandments.”

The first line of the Code: “I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery”; rings out like a trumpet fanfare in the minds of all Israelites. For the Jew, the Israelite, everything begins from this point. This is the beginning of their Great National Saga.

Israel lies at the Crossroads of the world, surrounded on all sides by nations who worshipped everything from the sun to the wind, to the mountain, even the spirit that dwelt in the tree. God pushes them all aside with the command that only he is God. Today we are astonished that man puts so much else in the place of God and relegates God or does away with him all together. Whether it is wealth or possession, military power or fame, we have all seen it. Yet, at a personal level, we forget that we too can become a slave to so much in our lives. We jealously guard our time refusing to break our routine for others or our job becomes all consuming at the expense of even our friends and family.

Using God’s name in vain has become so common in our time; keeping the Sabbath holy is no longer a priority in people’s lives. Years ago we used to have Blue Laws that prohibited stores and businesses from opening on a Sunday. Even if we were to dedicate Sunday as ‘Family Day’ we would be doing something in honor of God the author of life.

Honor your Father and your Mother is a command that goes long passed death and their dying. It touches at the core of our being and our origins. There is a sense in which each of

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us must continue the unfinished story of our parents. Even down to improving upon their failings. Don't we see that in the way we deal and treat our own children?

You shall not murder. We all know exactly what it means in the direst circumstances, but have you ever thought that it might apply when we murder someone's reputation, or how about when we kill a good idea because it didn't begin with us? And what about the opposite of murder, giving life and bringing love? For if we do not love, how we can say we keep God's commandments?

You shall not commit adultery. Jimmy Carter said that he committed adultery every day in his mind and he was ridiculed. Together with the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> commandments we are talking about a kind of stealing. Taking what doesn't belong to us. Again it's a corruption of the command to love, but it also questions the dignity that we give and hold each human person in.

You shall not steal. Stealing was so bad a sin that those guilty were punished by having their right hand cut off. Stealing was a sin against the community and the community outlawed the person by driving them out into the wilderness. Ask any hotel manager today about stealing, they will tell you that people have so little conscience about taking what is not theirs. Most hotels budget for their losses and include it on the bill.

Have you ever thought what the opposite of stealing is? Giving, giving that little extra, perhaps in a tip, or a gift or a mark of appreciation; the good boss who takes his employees out for a meal.

You shall not bear false witness. Jesus says: when you mean yes, say yes. When you say no, mean no. Truth has its own beauty and we should cherish that.

These are God's commandments. Jesus said that he came, not to change a single one of them, but that he came to add to them.

The good Christian does do this. They take the commandments and they turn them into an opportunity to forward Jesus' teaching. Surely, when Jesus introduces God to us as Father, he invites us to love God in a unique way. Building Christ's Kingdom is taking the commandments to a positive place. These commandments may well be the structure and roof under which we shelter, but what Jesus teaches in the Beatitudes, the Sermon on the Mount and in the Parables are the rest of the building blocks of Christ's Kingdom.

Here in this church we strive to bring that Gospel about:

In Lent our question should be how can I serve the Gospel today? For some time now I have noticed the difference between having a theory or a vision and making that vision come about. We hear it in sports, where football coaches talk execution. Certainly, if you work in business you know all about execution. In a parish setting procrastination is the death of the Gospel. Finding yourself stuck in reruns of old patterns of behavior and old thought patterns. The Gospel invites us to break out and claim the day. The Gospel invites

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us to renewal. It is a big Lenten theme. We approach Easter with a philosophy that we can renew and build.

Let us pray:

God our Father let us be your builders. Let us use your commandments to move towards building your Kingdom. In this season of Lent, let us embrace suffering and the suffering of others. Teach us the lessons of your son's passion and death that we may live more fully.

Amen+

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