



Bringing Home the Word

Third Sunday of Lent | March 4, 2018

The Spirit of the Ten Commandments

By Mary Katharine Deeley

The license plate on a friend's car reads "56789." When someone asked him about it, he said, "Those are the commandments I'm good at." We all had a laugh but, in truth, the commandments bear deeper reflection.

To pretend that our obedience to the Ten Commandments is limited to the literal words themselves is spiritually shallow. We may not have killed someone, but have we ever thought how much better it would be if someone weren't in our workplace or school? Have we ever hated someone with a passion that interferes with our actions?

We may not have stolen something from a store, but have we ever taken anything that doesn't belong to us—ideas, supplies from work? These don't belong to us. Are there ways in which we really want what a friend has or fail to remain faithful in body, mind, and spirit? The Ten Commandments impact us far more than we realize.

In today's Gospel, Jesus demonstrates how far the moneychangers in the temple area have strayed from the true spirit of the worship of God. They probably hadn't given it much thought—it was the way they'd always done business. But their action made things difficult for others.

God demands a transformation that deals not only with the wrong everyone can see, but with the subtle ways we violate God's laws and fail to love. The middle of Lent is a good time for us to make this change and, if we need to do so, repent. +

A Word From Pope Francis

Men and women are sacrificed to the idols of profit and consumption: it is the "culture of waste"....[When] someone dies, that is not news. When the stock market drops ten points, [it] is a tragedy!...People are thrown aside as if they were trash.

—General audience,
UN World Environment Day,
June 5, 2013



Sunday Readings

Exodus 20:1–17

[God said,] "You shall not steal."

1 Corinthians 1:22–25

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

John 2:13–25

[Jesus said,] "Take these out of here, and stop making my Father's house a marketplace."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- How does my faith foster humility in me?
- Are my Lenten practices helping me to be purified from sin and faithful to the gospel?



The Many Forms of Stealing

And How We Can Honor the Seventh Commandment

By Kathy Coffey

“You shall not steal” (Exodus 20:15).

We might think, “Whew! Got off easy on that one!” We law-abiding sorts don’t pilfer office supplies, skim from the collection plate, shoplift, or rob banks. At last, this is one commandment we’re handily observing, right?

Right—if we stick to the letter of the law. But the commandments are demanding, calling us beyond superficial observance. There are more forms of stealing than we might recognize. Let’s look first at homegrown forms, then at the larger picture of social justice.

For example, we rob our families of hours together when we work overtime at jobs to buy more than necessities.

The Church has long taught that people created by God are too precious to be merely a means of profit. Our birthright gifts as God’s children include dignity, security, the divine, transcendent love. So why do we hoard lesser things?

We steal a person’s enthusiasm with negative comments. We quash plans that sound naïve to us, quell a child’s creativity, stifle the initiative of a new employee. Unfounded fears can block imaginative solutions and worse—the inspiration of the Spirit.

Two forms of theft steal from the present: *anxiety* over the future or *mulling* about the past. Both rob the current moment of grace and potential.

It’s Not Just About Us

The items in closets that don’t fit or aren’t worn—these too are stolen from those who could be using them, who might actually be thrilled to have them. As St. Basil reminds us: “The coat in your closet belongs to the naked. The shoes rotting in your basement belong to the barefoot.”

Our property and talents belong to us but were given by God for the benefit of others. Here again, our model is Christ, who “became poor although he was rich, so that by his poverty you might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9).

A look through the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reveals social dimensions of this commandment, condemning: the payment of unjust wages, bribes to legislators, breaking a contract, and “work poorly done.” Furthermore, discrimination against women and immigrants, denying them job access, violates the Seventh Commandment.

How the foundations of Las Vegas must tremble to hear the words, “The passion for gambling risks becoming an enslavement” (CCC 2413). Intuitively we may cringe at the busloads of people pumping their savings into slot machines.

So, too, people who lavish more money and attention on pets than some children receive aren’t exercising proper stewardship: “One can love animals; one should not direct to them the affection due only to persons” (CCC 2418).

On a global scale, the arms race plunders the planet’s resources, substituting weapons for basic needs. President Dwight D. Eisenhower prophetically warned in his 1961 farewell address that the military-industrial complex could bleed our country’s riches.

Paying Back

To conclude on a bright note, many people are making efforts at reparation. Corporate pollution may steal clean water and air, but it’s heartening to think of the youth group at St. Edward the Confessor Parish in Richmond, VA. The kids sponsored a fast from every liquid but tap water and donated the money they would’ve spent to a project providing clean water in Nicaragua.

As Helen Keller said, “The world is full of suffering. It is full also of the overcoming of it.” Those who repay the thefts occurring in homes and society honor the Seventh Commandment brilliantly. +

PRAYER

Lord, you instill within me your power and wisdom. Help me discern clearly how to use your power and wisdom in service to my brothers and sisters.

—From *Mindful Meditations for Every Day of Lent and Easter*,
Rev. Warren J. Savage
and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

March 5–10, 2018

Mon. Lenten Weekday:
2 Kgs 5:1–15b / Lk 4:24–30


Tue. Lenten Weekday:
Dn 3:25, 34–43 / Mt 18:21–35

Wed. Lenten Weekday:
Dt 4:1, 5–9 / Mt 5:17–19

Thu. Lenten Weekday:
Jer 7:23–28 / Lk 11:14–23

Fri. Lenten Weekday:
Hos 14:2–10 / Mk 12:28–34

Sat. Lenten Weekday:
Hos 6:1–6 / Lk 18:9–14

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Bringing Home the Word

Fourth Sunday of Lent | March 11, 2018

We Are God's Handiwork

By Mary Katharine Deeley

My husband likes to photograph the beauty of creation. He has gotten very good at it, sometimes zooming in to focus on the details of individual flowers or butterflies, other times zooming out to capture the glory of a waterfall, a mountain lake, or the fiery clouds billowing from one of Hawaii's volcanoes into a night sky full of stars.

Several of his photos decorate my office walls. He's justifiably proud of each. They're the work of his artist's eye and hand, so he signs them and takes care to frame them just right.

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul calls us God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus—not because we are so amazing (we are, in fact, sinners), but because he loved us.

John's Gospel echoes the sentiment: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son." If a human being like my husband can take pleasure in and be justifiably proud of the work of his own hands, then how much more can God love his own handiwork? The answer, of course, is immeasurably more. God loved us enough to give us himself in Christ Jesus, who laid down his life for us though we had done nothing to deserve it.

The photos my husband creates can't thank him or give anything back to him, but it is in our power to thank our Creator, who filled us with life and redeemed us through Jesus' death and resurrection.

Today, try to love someone else a little more out of sheer gratitude that God so loves you. +

A Word From Pope Francis

Jesus shows a particular predilection for those who are wounded in body and in spirit: the poor, the sinners, the possessed, the sick, the marginalized. Thus, he reveals himself as a doctor both of souls and of bodies, the Good Samaritan of man. He is the true Savior: Jesus saves, Jesus cures, Jesus heals.

—Angelus, February 8, 2015



Sunday Readings

2 Chronicles 36:14–16, 19–23

Early and often the LORD...sent his messengers to them, for he had compassion on his people.

Ephesians 2:4–10

For we are his handiwork, created in Christ Jesus.

John 3:14–21

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS REFLECTION

- Do I need to repent from whatever attitudes or actions distance me from that love?
- Do I have any unspoken belief that, in some way, I am unlovable?



Imitating God's Powerful Mercy

By Kathy Coffey

"Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy."

—Matthew 5:7

When words aren't accompanied by actions, they lose power. If we hear someone talking endlessly about mercy but never practicing it, we yawn and turn away. "Don't just tell me; show me!" we protest.

To establish credibility, it is important to note how Jesus shows mercy before he ever mentions it. When we think of how he practiced mercy throughout his life, we remember dramatic cures of desperate people: the centurion's servant, paralytic, or hemorrhaging woman.

But we should also remember the ordinary, daily mercies he practiced as easily as breathing. This resembles the kind of mercy God showers on us. By all accounts, the disciples could be dense. Yet Jesus tolerated their stupid questions, petty feuds, and shameful disloyalty. Rarely did he show annoyance. He never said, "I've been with you this long and you still don't get it?"

Even more mercifully, he calls them his friends and asks them to continue his work on earth. He empowers them to preach the good news, cherish the poor, and cure the sick. Without a word about their miserable failings, he sends them on

a mission to be his witness throughout the earth. That is copious mercy.

Perhaps the last beatitude should be, "Blessed are those who live the beatitudes, for they bring the teaching alive." How do we learn to be merciful? Most agree that with charity, they'd rather be on the giving end. It's painful to receive, perhaps because humans often mix condescension with charity.

But mercy—ah, that's a different story. When we know we've goofed and squirm with tension awaiting the penalty, mercy comes like a cool breeze in the heat. Our self-defenses and excuses crumble with relief. In a burst of goodwill, we vow never to do that again or be so stupid.

Holding Back

And what of those who act mercifully? Here it's harder to be on the giving end. It's so tempting to "teach 'em a lesson they'll never forget," to assess the full payment. Just once, we have our coworkers, our opponent, our spouse, or our child in a position where we could demonstrate our power to pulverize. One who has made a mistake is—quite literally—"at our mercy."

And yet the merciful hold back. They relax into the image of a compassionate God, saying, "Let God take care of the punishment." Or they remember how often they've been in a jam, when others have shown mercy.

For centuries Christians have prayed, "Lord have mercy. Christ have mercy."

And God has given us mercy that far surpasses what we deserve.

God's Unending Mercy

Each morning, we receive the gift of twenty-four new, unexplored hours. We are given health, breath, and energy. God calls us to nurture the next generation, to make the world more beautiful through art, music, and literature. Furthermore, he gives us remarkable gifts: abilities to compute, meditate, inspire, heal, and teach. In a continuous flow of grace, God overlooks our worst errors and failures.

We may recognize God's mercy in a disaster narrowly averted, a diagnosis of "benign" instead of "malignant," events that come together to save our necks. After years of praying "Kyrie eleison," we can respond to this divine outpouring with a mercy that mirrors God's.

If God showers us daily with his mercies, we can be more tolerant of the slow coworker, resist the urge to lambaste a careless child, and show restraint when we discover the mistake of a friend. Then we all become richer in mercy. +



Lord, you are the source of love,
peace, and justice in the world.
Help me to live in communion
with you and all people.

From *Mindful Meditations for
Every Day of Lent and Easter*,
Rev. Warren J. Savage
and Mary Ann McSweeney

Jesus rarely showed annoyance.

WEEKDAY READINGS

March 12–17, 2018

Mon. Lenten Weekday:
Is 65:17–21 / Jn 4:43–54


Tue. Lenten Weekday:
Ez 47:1–9, 12 / Jn 5:1–16

Wed. Lenten Weekday:
Is 49:8–15 / Jn 5:17–30

Thu. Lenten Weekday:
Ex 32:7–14 / Jn 5:31–47

Fri. Lenten Weekday:
Wis 2:1a, 12–22 / Jn 7:1–2, 10, 25–30

Sat. Lenten Weekday:
Jer 11:18–20 / Jn 7:40–53

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Bringing Home the Word

Fifth Sunday of Lent | March 18, 2018

Jesus' Light in Our Darkness

By Mary Katharine Deeley

I've lived in the Midwest most of my life. In the last few years, I've found myself appreciating why some of my senior friends enjoy spending time in warmer climates during the winter months. As I've gotten older, the range of temperatures that feel comfortable to me has grown increasingly narrow—and while I'm not yet ready to pull up stakes, the thought of it crosses my mind more frequently.

But as the Graeme Miles folk song "Dark December" reminds us, we shouldn't dislike winter. We celebrate the birth of Jesus—the light in our darkness—in the winter. In a four-season climate like that of the Midwest, we're particularly attuned to dark and light, death and life. We sense the days growing shorter and longer; we see leaves fall and plants sleep, only to reawaken when the weather turns warm. We know what lamps to light so we can see in those dark times and what clothes to wear until the warming sun brings the world to life once more.

The prophets knew God was stirring in the world, and they knew God's promise of light and salvation. For Jeremiah, light and life came in the promise of a new covenant—a new relationship with the Lord.

The Greeks of John's Gospel sensed that Jesus was the key to the light they longed for, and so they wanted to see him. John also says that to truly live, we must be like grain and die to ourselves.

Light into darkness, death into life—maybe the experience of winter helps us understand that just a little more. +

A Word From Pope Francis

If God could weep, then I too can weep, in the knowledge that he understands me. The tears of Jesus serve as an antidote to my indifference before the suffering of my brothers and sisters. His tears teach me to make my own the pain of others.

—Prayer Vigil to "Dry the Tears,"
May 5, 2016



Sunday Readings

Jeremiah 31:31–34

I will place my law within them, and write it upon their hearts.

Hebrews 5:7–9

[Christ Jesus]...became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.

John 12:20–33

[Jesus said,] "Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there also will my servant be. The Father will honor whoever serves me."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- How can I more deeply receive Jesus' self-giving love for me?
- How should I imitate Jesus' self-giving love in my relationships?



God Comforts His People

By Donald Senior, CP

“Blessed are they who mourn,
for they will be comforted.”

—Matthew 5:4

Only those who have not lived long enough do not know what it means to mourn. The death of a parent or spouse. The end of a marriage or friendship. The loss of a job. All of these cut into our hearts and make us weep.

Jesus’ words in this beatitude touch on this painful, profound human experience. The Scriptures are not abstract or the result of a first-century theological seminar. The words and passions of the Bible resonate with the down-to-earth weeping of genuine human beings.

The Bible knows all about loss and mourning: the grief of Abraham at the death of Sarah; the profound sadness of Moses as he gazed at the Promised Land he would never enter; Rachel weeping for her lost children; the tears of Jesus as he laments over his beloved city of Jerusalem and its impending fate.

The Greek word *penthountes*—to weep or mourn—is used in the passage of Isaiah 61:1–3, a text that interpreters of Matthew’s Gospel believe had a strong influence on the formulation of the beatitudes:

Penthountes, a Greek word meaning “to weep or mourn,” may have influenced the formulation of the beatitudes.

“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; He has sent me to bring good news to the afflicted, to bind up the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, release to the prisoners...to comfort all who mourn.”

In this text, those who mourn are those who are “afflicted,” “brokenhearted,” “captives,” “prisoners.” This is the grief of those who feel they have lost everything: their hope, freedom, and reason for living.

Lingering Images

It is hard to hear about mourning and not think about the recent losses and violent deaths that have occurred in our own country and around the world. Images of people weeping over the violently broken bodies of loved ones are burned into our hearts. So, too, are the dazed and haggard faces of refugees created by war—people without hope, in desperate need of food and shelter, wailing in anguish.

In calling those who mourn “blessed,” Jesus does not suggest that there is anything pleasant or beneficial in mourning. People mourn because of tragedy and suffering. Some suffering is the result of sin, such as violence inflicted on the innocent or abject poverty imposed on people without means. There is nothing blessed about that. No, the only reason people who mourn are blessed is because God hears their cries and will comfort them.

Our Responsive God

A fundamental belief of our Christian faith appears in the second half of this beatitude. No cry of the poor and suffering will go unanswered. Early in the biblical saga, God made that clear when he said to Moses, “I have heard the cries of my people and have come to rescue them.” Jesus’ prophetic words echo that same sentiment. God is not indifferent to human suffering and will comfort those who mourn. This is the intent of the reign of God for which Jesus has come.

Now Jesus’ words give direction to our lives. It is understandable that we lament the sufferings we witness or experience. Jesus, too, lamented the sufferings of his people and cried out in anguish at the prospect of his own death on the cross.

At the same time, we take heart in knowing that God still holds all those who suffer in the palm of his hand. Comforting those who mourn and alleviating their suffering are divine, noble works that we are called to as Jesus’ followers. +



Lord, your love is written on my heart. May your love inspire and empower me to love people from all walks of life.

From *Mindful Meditations for Every Day of Lent and Easter*,
Rev. Warren J. Savage
and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

March 19–24, 2018

Mon. St. Joseph: 2 Sm 7:4–5a, 12–14a, 16 / Rom 4:13, 16–18, 22 / Mt 1:16, 18–21, 24a or Lk 2:41–51a

Tue. Lenten Weekday: Nm 21:4–9 / Jn 8:21–30

Wed. Lenten Weekday: Dn 3:14–20, 91–92, 95 / Jn 8:31–42

Thu. Lenten Weekday: Gn 17:3–9 / Jn 8:51–59

Fri. Lenten Weekday: Jer 20:10–13 / Jn 10:31–42

Sat. Lenten Weekday: Ez 37:21–28 / Jn 11:45–56

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Bringing Home the Word

Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion | March 25, 2018

A Story Worth Singing About

By Mary Katharine Deeley

Traditions help us order the world and mark the passing of time. As my children grew up, we marked our entry into the Christmas season by decorating the Christmas tree, reading the Dylan Thomas classic *A Child's Christmas in Wales*, and singing the choral parts of Handel's *Messiah*.

Most people are familiar with Handel's masterpiece, but not everyone knows it was composed as an oratorio for Easter, not Christmas. If we listen to the whole thing, we hear the familiar prophecies of Isaiah and Paul's triumphant cry, "O Death, where is thy sting?" The glorious "Hallelujah Chorus" announces the triumphant reign of the risen Christ.

Every year on Palm Sunday and Good Friday, for much longer than our traditions have held sway, the Church has told the story of the passion and death of Jesus. This story marks our entrance into the faith of the Church and orders our sacred time.

It's the story of a death that leads to life—both the resurrected life of Jesus, which we celebrate next week, and the eternal life that's ours if we follow him.

In Mark's telling of the story, we encounter the woman who anointed Jesus and the young man who ran away when Jesus was arrested.

Each Gospel writer gives us a slightly different version of the story, and each writer adds to our perspective and our understanding that this man and this death weren't like any other. This Jesus was God, who emptied himself so we might live.

Surely that's worth singing about. +

A Word From Pope Francis

Jerusalem, of course, means "city of peace." This is what God wills it to be....Yet sadly Jerusalem remains deeply troubled as a result of long-standing conflicts....May efforts and energies be increasingly directed to the pursuit of a just and lasting solution to the conflicts which have caused so much suffering.

—Welcoming ceremony,
visit to Tel Aviv,
May 25, 2014



Sunday Readings

Mark 11:1–10 or John 12:12–16

Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!

Isaiah 50:4–7

I have set my face like flint, knowing that I shall not be put to shame.

Philippians 2:6–11

[Jesus became] obedient unto death, even death on a cross.

**Mark 14:1—15:47 or
Mark 15:1–39**

[Jesus cried...] "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Do I value the infinite mercy of Jesus, who forgives me whenever I turn to him sincerely?
- In order to love with greater peace, what do I need to accept or embrace?



Why Do Catholics...?

By Thomas H. Groome

There are Catholic practices that can seem strange to people of other faiths. We may

sometimes need reminding about why we do certain things. Three old favorites: Why do Catholics pray to the saints, pray for the souls of the dead, and confess sins to a priest? All three practices reflect the communal understanding that we have of our Christian faith.

Praying to the saints: From their earliest days, Christians have been convinced that baptism bonds us into the body of Christ and that this bond is never broken—not even by death. Further, baptism unites us with the dying and rising of Christ, the paschal mystery that promises new life for all. In this resurrection faith, death is simply a transition. For the dead, life is changed, not ended.

The saints have entered into Jesus' new life in God's presence, yet they remain bonded with us. Much as we would ask a living person to pray for us, we can ask the saints likewise. Strictly speaking, we don't pray *to* saints as if they can answer our prayers; only God can do so. Instead, we ask them to pray *with* and *for* us.

Of course, Mary rightly holds pride of place in the communion of saints. We presume that, like all children, Jesus had

special affection for his mother. If Mary prays for us, how can Jesus decline his own mother?

“Those Who Have Gone Before Us”

Praying for the souls of the departed:

The first Christians began the practice of praying for “those who have gone before us, marked with the sign of faith.” They knew the challenge of discipleship and how easy it is to fall short. Yet they were also confident in God's mercy, augmented by the saving work of Jesus. So, for those who might not be quite ready, they intuited that God provides an intermediate state of purgation between death and final judgment.

The living can intercede for the departed souls. We can pray for them; do an act of mercy, love, or justice on their behalf; and somehow our efforts can work to prepare them for God's eternal presence. A favorite Catholic practice is to have Mass celebrated for their “eternal rest.”

Confessing to a priest: Again, our communal faith is key to why we confess to a priest in the sacrament of reconciliation. The Bible teaches that every sin hurts the community, if only to diminish the holiness of the people of God. Thus, the rituals of repentance throughout the Hebrew Scriptures are


communal events, with all as a people admitting their sinfulness and asking for God's mercy.

Four Key Steps

As when we apologize for offending another person, repentance always requires that we 1) admit fault, 2) say we are sorry, 3) ask forgiveness, and 4) resolve to make amends to the aggrieved person. The sacrament of reconciliation has taken different forms over its history but has always required these four steps. For many centuries the admission of sins had to be done before the whole community. Eventually this was done in private to a priest who was sworn to secrecy.

Strictly speaking, we confess to God. The priest, acting in the person of Christ and in the name of the community, assures us of God's forgiveness. He says, “Through the ministry of the Church, may God give you pardon and peace, and I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” With gratitude, the penitent says, “Amen.” What a gift! +

Three common Catholic practices that people wonder about reflect the communal understanding that we have of our Christian faith.



Lord, you empty yourself out in loving service to all people. Give me a selfless spirit that I may be of service to others.

From Mindful Meditations for Every Day of Lent and Easter,
Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

March 26–31, 2018

Monday of Holy Week: Is 42:1–7 / Jn 12:1–11
 Tuesday of Holy Week: Is 49:1–6 / Jn 13:21–33, 36–38
 Wednesday of Holy Week: Is 50:4–9a / Mt 26:14–25
 Holy Thursday: Ex 12:1–8, 11–14 / 1 Cor 11:23–26 / Jn 13:1–15

Good Friday: Is 52:13–53:12 / Heb 4:14–16; 5:7–9 / Jn 18:1–19:42
 Holy Saturday: Gn 1:1–2:2 or 1:1, 26–31a / Gn 22:1–18 or 22:1–2, 9a, 10–13, 15–18 / Ex 14:15–15:1 / Is 54:5–14 / Is 55:1–11 / Bar 3:9–15, 32–4:4 / Ez 36:16–17a, 18–28 / Rom 6:3–11 / Mk 16:1–7