Several days after Moses received the Commandments of God, he made another pilgrimage to Mount Sinai. After a great deal of arduous climbing he arrived at the spot and once again saw the burning bush. He removed his sandals, knelt down and offered a prayer of entreaty to the LORD saying, "Oh mighty God, your people have sent me back to ask you a question about the Ten Commandments."

"They are very simple," roared the LORD God out of the bush, "what question do they have?".

"They want to know," Moses replied, "are they listed by priority?"

The Ten Commandments are at the very core of our faith and one of the keys elements of our faith that we share with other Christian denominations, Judaism and even Islam as well. This makes sense since all ten of the Commandments are relational: they show us how we are to relate to God and to each other. More importantly, they constitute the Divine Law of God and are the standard of Divine Justice given to mankind as both a guide and covenantal pact with God. If these commandments are so important and fundamental to faith, why do we have so much trouble keeping them? More importantly, what is the consequence of NOT keeping them? This is what we struggle with most as human beings: balancing human weakness with faithful observance and our understanding of Justice and Mercy.

God understands this all too well though and this is why He offers all of us His infinite Mercy. The Ten Commandments were in fact given to us for our own good and out of Mercy. When we view the commandments from the point of view of God, our Father, we can see that they were given to us to help us align ourselves with the Father’s will, to save us and give us eternal life with Him. If we strive to view the commandments in this way, it becomes easier to see the Commandments as instruments of Mercy rather than
merely laws. When we view the Commandments in this way we can more clearly see them as the source of both Justice and Mercy. Jesus as God incarnate and as Mercy incarnate came to deliver us from ourselves and to help guide us to the way of God. By rearticulating and reemphasizing the fundamental nature of the Ten Commandments, Jesus is helping us to see the balance of Justice and Mercy when we fail to maintain the balance of righteousness and error. He does this, not by watering the Commandments down but in fact by expanding them, “You have heard it said…but I say to you.” It is in this way that Jesus is proving to us that he has not come to change the Law but rather to bring it to its completeness and fulfill its promise. In Jesus resides Justice and Mercy.

This is a big issue right now in our country and in our Church. There is a tendency to view Justice and Mercy as opposing concepts. Justice defined by how we follow the Law and Mercy sought when we don’t. We see this in the debates on immigration that are taking place in our country right now. But we also see the apparent opposition of Mercy and Justice with our own Church as Pope Francis is often criticized for promoting Mercy over adherence to Church teaching and doctrine in some peoples’ eyes. In both of these examples the fundamental problem is with failing to see the harmony of Justice and Mercy as part of a greater whole. We are a country of laws and we have an obligation to assure that our citizens are safe and given every opportunity to thrive and succeed within the boundaries of those laws. We must also acknowledge that we have a responsibility to love our neighbors as our self by showing Mercy to those who are driven from their homeland by unjust governments, war and attacks on human dignity. In the middle of this debate is the fulcrum on which Justice and Mercy are balanced; our challenge is to find that fulcrum.

Our Church is facing a similar dilemma. We must understand that doctrine without Mercy is lifeless. If we put all our focus on the sin instead of the sinner then we’ve gained nothing. Likewise, if we only console the sinner without acknowledging the sin then we do not truly help anyone. I think Pope Francis is trying to show us that the balance of Justice and Mercy is what Jesus embodies and His Church should reflect that same balance to the world. It is this balance that is being conveyed to us today. Today Jesus is showing us that
beyond strict laws, the Commandments are here for our own benefit and that following them is doing the
Father’s Will not simply His bidding.

We are all sinners. Each of us at one time or another has wondered, “how far from these
Commandments can I drift before it’s a sin.” Each of us has had to choose to either follow God’s
Commandments or not; to prioritize them for ourselves, if you will. The Law of God is eternal and unchanging
but its expressions and applications are dynamic and merciful. Jesus did not come to abolish ANY part of the
Law of Justice but rather came to fulfill the Mercy on which the Law is based. It is in this way that the
harmony of the divine plan is shown to all humanity through ten simple Commandments in the gift from God
that is Justice and Mercy.