

9th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle B

Note: Where a Scripture text is underlined in the body of this discussion, it is recommended that the reader look up and read that passage.

1st Reading - Deuteronomy 5:12-15

The title of this book comes from the Greek mistranslation of Deuteronomy 17:18 as “this second law” rather than “a copy of the law,” which, although an inaccurate translation, points to a basic problem of the book – the relation of the law promulgated in Moab (the setting for this book) to the original law of Sinai (as documented in Exodus). The Hebrew title for this book is taken from its opening words “These are the words.”

The setting is at the end of the Israelites’ forty year sojourn in the desert. They are now at the Plains of Moab in preparation for entering the promised land. Moses knows that he will not accompany them across the Jordan River and now gives them the rules by which they must conduct themselves as they take possession of the land promised to Abraham and his descendants.

The covenant of Deuteronomy is different from that of Mount Sinai. God spoke the Sinai covenant directly to Israel, while He commands Moses to make this one. Many of the original terms of the Sinai covenant are retained but they are accompanied by legal and moral concessions [divorce and remarriage (Deuteronomy 24:1), foreign slave-wives (Deuteronomy 21:10-14), genocidal warfare against Canaanites (Deuteronomy 20:16-17) are a few examples]; ritual stipulations [sacrificial offering of the firstborn of the herds and flocks (Deuteronomy 15:19-20) at a central sanctuary (Deuteronomy 12:5-8)]; and redemptive curses (Deuteronomy 28:15-68).

What we hear today is from the restatement of the ten commandments as we hear the third commandment (the fourth commandment as many Protestants number them).

¹² “Take care to keep holy the sabbath day as the LORD, your God, commanded you.

This is a reminder to be diligent. Ancient peoples had their festivals dedicated to their gods, and to rest and relaxation; but there is no evidence of their having a regular custom of a specified day of rest of the sort found in the Decalogue. When this commandment was first given (Exodus 20:8) it was phrased “Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day.” This is the only commandment which the violation of which becomes a mortal sin simply by failing to remember.

¹³ Six days you may labor and do all your work; ¹⁴ but the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD, your God. No work may be done then, whether by you, or your son or daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or ass or any of your beasts, or the

alien who lives with you. Your male and female slave should rest as you do. ¹⁵ For remember that you too were once slaves in Egypt, and the LORD, your God, brought you from there with his strong hand and outstretched arm. That is why the LORD, your God, has commanded you to observe the sabbath day.

Here, the Sabbath observance has a social and humanitarian motivation rather than being a theological reference to creation (Exodus 20:11, Genesis 2:2). Traditional Jewish teaching says that, during the six days of the week, Israelites are cooperators with God in creation and they should cooperate by improving and enhancing the things that He has created. And, as a parallel to this, on the seventh day they should rest along with the Almighty and proclaim that He is Lord.

Ever since the apostolic age, the Church has celebrated Sunday instead of Saturday as the day of rest, and concerning Sunday observance it teaches: "The institution of the Lord's Day helps everyone enjoy adequate rest and leisure to cultivate their familial, cultural, social and religious lives" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2184).

2nd Reading - 2 Corinthians 4:6-11

Last week we heard Saint Paul's response to the accusation of his adversaries that he is ever recommending himself. He notes that whatever testimonial he needs in written in the very hearts of the Corinthians who by their faith bear witness to his worth; unlike his accusers who, it appears, arrived bearing letters of recommendation. We now hear him begin to describe the afflictions and persecution to which he, as a bearer of the Gospel, finds himself subjected; and how God's grace always comes to his aid. The sufferings and tribulations which he encounters are not unlike those of Jesus Christ Himself.

⁶ For God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness,"

An allusion to Genesis 1:3 and possibly John 1:4-5.

has shone in our hearts to bring to light the knowledge of the glory of God on the face of (Jesus) Christ.

The glory of the New Covenant shines forth perennially on the face of Christ, whose members we are; whereas the passing splendor of the Old Covenant, which was mirrored on the face of Moses, gradually disappeared. Contrary to the darkness which descends upon those who resist belief, God has enlightened the hearts of Christians with the light of faith. "Previously, that is, before being converted to Christ, we were dark, like you and like those in whom the brightness of Christ's glory does not shine. Now, however, after Christ calling us through His grace, the darkness has been taken away from us, and the power of the glory of the clear light of Christ shining in us. It shines so powerfully in us that not only are we given light to let us see: we also have light for giving to others" (St. Thomas Aquinas,

Commentary on 2 Corinthians).

7 But we hold this treasure

The apostolic ministry

in earthen vessels,

An allusion to Genesis 2:7. Man, fashioned from the clay of the ground, is a fragile earthen vessel into which the precious Gospel message has been placed by God. Because of the poor instrument which God has chosen to use, His divine power and glory are all the more revealed.

that the surpassing power may be of God and not from us. 8 We are afflicted in every way, but not constrained; perplexed, but not driven to despair; 9 persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed;

The Christian can always count on God's help; no matter what trials they have to undergo. Victory can be attained with the grace of God. Our earthen vessel can become damaged in the onslaught but can be put back together again, as good as new, in the sacrament of penance. Victory can be attained with the grace of God.

10 always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our body.

As happened in Saint Paul's case, in their daily lives Christians must relive the sufferings of Christ through self-denial and penance: this is part of following Christ and imitating Him.

11 For we who live are constantly being given up to death for the sake of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

The life of a Christian is a life of sacrifice, penance, and expiation. We must make reparation for our sins and those of all mankind. "No trial has come to you but what is human. God is faithful and will not let you be tried beyond your strength; but with the trial he will also provide a way out, so that you may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13). We must always try to imitate Christ because we know that God is with us always.

Gospel - Mark 2:23-3:6

Jesus has begun His public ministry in Galilee and has already gotten the attention of the Pharisees, those who saw themselves as the "keepers of the Law." He has exorcized a demon on the Sabbath (Mark 1:23-28), He has cured a paralytic and forgiven his sins (Mark 2:1-12), He has eaten with publicans and sinners (Mark 2:13-17, He and His followers do

not fast (Mark 2:18-22), and now we are to hear of His disciples picking grain on the Sabbath and of Jesus healing the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath. All of these things are in violation of the Law in the rigorous eyes of the Levites.

23 As he was passing through a field of grain on the sabbath, his disciples began to make a path while picking the heads of grain. 24 At this the Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the sabbath?"

According to the interpretation of the Pharisees, the third commandment (our first reading) forbade any work on the Sabbath, even the plucking of a few heads of grain for personal consumption.

25 He said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he was in need and he and his companions were hungry? 26 How he went into the house of God when Abiathar was high priest and ate the bread of offering that only the priests could lawfully eat, and shared it with his companions?"

Jesus appeals to 1 Samuel 21:2-7. By saying "Have you never read" He is admonishing them for their inflexible application of the Law when the Sacred Scriptures themselves showed that there were exceptions to the regulations. The bread which David and his companions had eaten was the Bread of the Presence which was twelve loaves (or cakes) placed each morning on the table in the Holy Place (the area immediately outside the Holy of Holies in the Temple) as homage to the Lord from the twelve tribes of Israel. The loaves which were removed to make room for the fresh ones were reserved for the use of the priests (Leviticus 24:5-9).

27 Then he said to them, "The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath.

The Sabbath had been established not only for man's rest, but also to allow him to give glory to God.

28 That is why the Son of Man

Son of Man is a title which Jesus applies to Himself; He is never called this by anyone else. It refers to the prophecy of Daniel 7:13. The expression "Son of Man" occurs 69 times in the synoptic gospels and it is clear that Jesus prefers it to other ways of describing the Messiah, including Son of David, and Messiah. There are no nationalistic overtones in the title "Son of Man."

is lord even of the sabbath."

Jesus has every right to say that He is Lord of the Sabbath – He is God. He restores the weekly day of rest to its full, religious meaning: it is not just a matter of fulfilling a number of legal precepts or of concern for physical well-being; the Sabbath belongs to God. The

Church, from the time of the apostles onward, has observed this precept on Sunday, the Lord's day; in celebration of the resurrection of Christ.

^{3:1} Again he entered the synagogue. There was a man there who had a withered hand. ² They watched him closely to see if he would cure him on the sabbath so that they might accuse him. ³ He said to the man with the withered hand, "Come up here before us." ⁴ Then he said to them, "Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath rather than to do evil, to save life rather than to destroy it?"

According to Matthew 12:11, Jesus uses the argument of rescuing a sheep which has fallen into a pit on the Sabbath and asks "of how much more value is a man than a sheep." Here in Mark, He is recorded as using a more universal principle of doing good on the Sabbath rather than evil, saving a life rather than destroying it.

But they remained silent.

Then He asked them about a point on which they could hardly disagree: "Is it permitted to do good?" But they did not even so much as say 'Yes,' because by then they were not in a good temper" (Saint Athanasius, *Homilies 28*).

⁵ Looking around at them with anger and grieved at their hardness of heart,

This is the only time in the gospels that we are told that Jesus showed indignation. They are so concerned about Him breaking the Sabbath law that they have forgotten the reason that the law was made. They have become hypocrites by "working" on the Sabbath to see that others didn't work. "Feelings cannot exist in anything but a living soul. These events show that just as Jesus had a human body He had a human soul. We read about the diversity of His feelings in the reports of the same evangelists (who attested His divinity): Jesus was astonished (Matthew 10:8), was angered (Mark 3:5), was grieved (John 11:33-35), was elated (Hebrews 12:2), and similar emotive responses without number. Likewise it is clear that He experienced the ordinary fully human experience of interconnectedness between His body and His soul. He was hungry (Matthew 4:2; Luke 4:2), He slept (Matthew 8:24; Mark 4:38; Luke 8:3), He was tired from His journey (John 4:6)" (Saint Augustine, *Against The Apollinarians*, 80).

he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out and his hand was restored. ⁶ The Pharisees went out and immediately took counsel with the Herodians against him to put him to death.

The Pharisees were the spiritual leaders of Judaism; the Herodians were those who supported the regime of Herod, benefitting politically and financially thereby. The two groups were completely opposed to each other and avoided one another's company, yet they have formed an alliance to work against Jesus. The Pharisees wanted to get rid of Him because they considered Him a dangerous innovator who lowered their own prestige in the

eyes of the people. The Herodians despised the supernatural and eschatological tone of Jesus' message because they looked forward to a purely political and temporal Messiah who would rule them.

St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Church, Picayune, MS
<http://www.scborromeo.org>