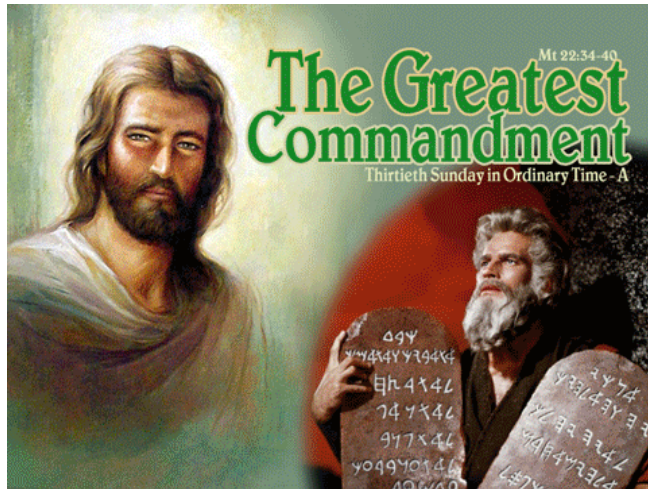


## Homily for October 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020 – 30<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time



When Jews of Biblical times read the first five books of the Bible (also called the Pentateuch, Torah or the Law of Moses), they discerned, for better or for worse, that there were 613 laws that they felt God was asking them to follow. (By the way, we have 1752 laws as Catholics in the Code of Canon Law). These 613 were apart from the 10 biggies we have come to know as the 10 Commandment. Now, the

Pharisees who are mentioned in today's gospel, were the guardians of the law and made sure everyone followed the rules even though we know they often gave bad examples themselves prompting Jesus to call them hypocrites. At some point, the Pharisees' relationship to the law became more important than their relationship with God. We have that in our own denomination of Roman Catholicism. You have all met at least one person who comes across as "more Catholic than the pope." That's a person whose relationship with the law is more important than their relationship with God, with neighbour, or with the earth. But before we label them as bad or mis-guided honesty would have us all admit, that there is a little Pharisee, a little hypocrisy in all of us.

Interestingly, of the 613 laws the Jews felt needed to be followed 248 were positive, that is, they began with "Thou shall..." If you do a little math and subtract these 248 positive laws from the total of 613 laws overall, you are left with 365. These 365 laws were negative, that is, they started off with "Thou shall not..." one thou-shall-not for each day of the year.

Many Catholics, some even down to today, were raised with an image of God who was always reminding them "thou shall not." Almost everything, outside of pious thoughts, was considered either a sin or an occasion to sin. God was seen as the prohibition to human fulfilment, the one who did not delight in you and who did not want you to delight in anything yourself. In other words, if you were enjoying life too much, you were probably sinning. That kind of mentality made for a lot of scrupulous Catholics and gave us Catholics the reputation of being a

denomination of rules to be followed and guilt-laden if we didn't. Many non-Catholics would look at us and ask: "why do you Catholics walk around with so much guilt all the time?"

My father, who's pushing 87, often says, "growing up, everything was considered a sin." It seemed like everything was a prohibition; you were always taking your internal temperature as to whether something was prohibited or not. He's at least half right. Jesus, on the other hand, never presents God as the one prohibiting us from becoming all that we can become as if some secret jealousy causes God to hold things back. In fact, it is just the opposite. Jesus says, **"I came that you may have life and have it to the full"** (Jn. 10:10). This does not sound like someone holding something back. Jesus says in another part of the gospels, **"Everything the Father has told me, I have said to you"** (Jn. 14:26). This does not sound like Jesus is prohibiting our growth. Again, Jesus said, **"As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you."** These are so far from the thou-shall-not statements that many grew up with and many still can't get past.

As I get older, I personally think I've given too much time and energy to "balance" and maybe you have too. We are all trying to balance, juggle, or multitask a number of things. And that's O.K., but perhaps rhythm is more important than balance. You've all heard this from the Book of Ecclesiastes: **there is a time to plant and a time to harvest.** This is not about balance; you are not doing a little bit of planting and a little bit of harvesting at the same time and questioning yourself as to whether you are doing too much of one and not enough of another. **There is a time for mourning and a time for dancing.** This is not about balance. You are not mourning and dancing at the same time feeling a little guilty that maybe you shouldn't be dancing so much (after all, you just buried your husband four days ago!). **There is a time to speak and a time to be silent.** This is not about balance. You cannot speak and be silent at the same time. Life is not about balance; it's more about rhythm. If it was about balance, you would have to take some work with you on holidays, and then it is no longer a holiday.

Jesus himself was for rhythm much more than balance. He said, **"You don't fast while you are in the presence of the bridegroom"** (Lk. 5:34). Nor would you take your laptop with you as you lay on a beach in Hawaii. One of my favorite writers is a minister in United States, Nadia Bolz-Weber, and she writes: **"Maybe rhythm, not balance, is the key to not falling off the too-much-or-too-little pleasure**

***plank. Maybe here is where grace can enter. Allowing ourselves a bit of time in each place rather than continuously monitoring moderation. A rhythm of feasting and fasting. Of indulgence and denial. Of Lent and Easter.***” (p. 147 in Shame-less). I think she’s right.

Jesus never throws out the Law or the commandment; he has too much respect for them. ***“I did not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it”*** (Mt. 5:17). By the same token, he is not continually taking his internal temperature asking the questions “Did I follow all 613 laws? What if I didn’t? Which are the primary laws, the secondary laws, the tertiary laws? What if I follow some really well and others not so well, will God still love me? Will I be saved...on balance?” These are questions of balance which always leaves us unsatisfied, because we are always doubting if we really are leading a balanced life. But when we live by grace we know that love of God, love of neighbour, and love of self are the only things worthy of our time and energy. The other laws, as important as they may be, are peanuts in comparison. Every now and again, a person like Francis of Assisi, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, or a Becca Schofield comes into our lives and reminds us to return to the simplicity of the Gospel, that is to love God, neighbour and self as we were always meant to do.

***A little story to end. Powers Hapgood (I don’t make these names up!), an American who lived during the early and mid-twentieth century, was Harvard educated and inherited a factory. But he gave the factory to the workers and was later, just after World War II, arrested for protesting for the poor. In court, the judge asked him: “Mr. Hapgood, you are Harvard educated, why would anyone of your advantages choose to live as you do?” Hapgood replied: “Because of the Sermon on the Mount, sir.”*** (quoted by Ron Rolheiser in Sacred Fire, p. 96).

He cut to the chase and allowed the gospel message of love of self, neighbour, and God to command his actions. The rest took care of itself.

***Fr. Phil***