

Reflection for Wednesday 3rd Week of Lent

Deut 4:1, 5-9 Matthew 5:17-19.

JESUS AND THE LAW

The common theme of the readings is the Law of God. In the First Reading, Moses urges the people to be faithful to God's Law, without adding to it or subtracting from it.

God's Law is not a burden to be endured, but a source of life and wisdom.

Jesus found no fault with the law itself. Jesus' problem lay with the way the law was interpreted and applied by the religious leaders of his day. For them, it was the letter of the law that mattered. Once you fulfil that, you are okay. But for Jesus, it was the spirit of the law that mattered. The important thing is not how many commandments we obey, but the spirit in which we obey them.

Again, Jesus saw that the commandments were interpreted in a very negative way which led to minimalism – doing the bare minimum. He interpreted them in a positive way. For example, the fifth commandment says, 'Thou shalt not kill.' But Jesus said, 'You must love your neighbour.' The seventh commandment says, 'Thou shalt not steal.' But Jesus said, 'You must share your goods with your neighbour when he is in need.'

Jesus also saw that obedience was often rooted in fear. He wanted it rooted in love. Jesus' whole relationship with his heavenly Father was based on love. When you love someone, you avoid doing anything to hurt that person. No truly loving act can ever be sinful. Where there is love, there is really no need of law. The motive under which we Christians should live is the motive of love. Jesus set before us, not the law of God, but the love of God.

The most significant thing of all that Jesus did was this: Jesus brought in a new and more exacting law – the law of love. Far from contradicting or abolishing the old law, the new law goes beyond it and so brings it to perfection. Jesus said that all of God's laws could be reduced to two: love of God and love of neighbour.

In truth, there is only one law – the law of love; and there is only one sin – not to love.

Fr Patrick