

LIGHT & LIFE

FATHER REGINALD MARTIN, O.P., DIRECTOR

Vol. 66, No. 6 - A WESTERN DOMINICAN PUBLICATION

ADVENT: MARY'S SEASON

We call May and October "Mary's" months, and for good reason, but the Church's true, liturgical season devoted to Mary is the time of Advent. During these days the readings at Mass call us to listen to the history of God's people, and to see Mary as the fulfillment of every good impulse that drew Israel to God, and kept a nation faithful to God's covenant in spite of betrayal, war and exile.

Our faith tells us that Jesus was like us in all things but sin. Which means that he was unlike us in one very important way. Our faith also tells us that Mary, the mother of God, was like us in all things – not in sin, of course, but by sharing humankind's common need to be delivered from it, she by a special act of God's grace before her birth, we by God's grace at Baptism.

The Immaculate Conception is an event of immense importance in Mary's life, of course, but it is an event that gives us immense hope, as well. For what God has done for Mary, he does for us all – for her before her birth, for us, after. And for the same reason. So that we, like Mary, might give flesh and blood to God's word and present Christ to the world.

Our bodies are no less material by Jesus' taking on our mortality from the Virgin Mary, but the Incarnation that begins remotely, with Mary's Immaculate Conception, gives our bodies a new vocation. We are no less mortal, but grace enables us to say 'yes,' and that same grace charges us to present the human face of God's Word to the world, and to touch the world with Christ's loving hands.

Ronald Knox composed a book, *A Retreat for Lay People*, which begins and ends with a reflection on the Virgin Mary; in each he asks us to consider her calm, her quiet, her serenity. In our fast-moving world, quiet and calm people can be taken for depressed, lazy or lethargic, but Knox points out there is another side to this, and that is "... the knack of putting first thing first." After the Annunciation, he remarks, Mary pays her visit to Elizabeth "in haste," but not "in a hurry." Our dictionary defines "haste" as speed, but adds that it is speed combined with a certain purpose or dispatch, which echoes Knox's observation, "Calm people don't need to be in a hurry, because they hasten at the right moment, about the right things."



THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

There is another voice we ought to consider during these days of Advent, and that is John the Baptist's. Both Mary and John spent their lives in service of God's Word, and the details in the legends that surround the birth of Mary echo those told in the Scripture of John the Baptist, if only because both stories say an aged couple, after years of prayer, finally welcomed the birth of a child.

The charming legends tell us that when she was three years old, Mary's parents took her to Jerusalem, to arrange for her education, and to dedicate her to the Lord. When they arrived at the Temple, the stories go, Mary broke away from them, ran up the stairs, and to the delight of all danced before the Lord and those who were assembled to welcome them.

The Prophet Isaiah says, "How beautiful are the feet of the one who brings good news." Notice, it is the preacher's feet that are beautiful, not the sandals. Mary shows us what counts. In her youth her feet teach us to offer God a joyful sacrifice of our lives. After the Annunciation, those same feet, we are told, go "with haste" to share the Good News of the Incarnation with her kinswoman Elizabeth.

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THE ROSARY LIGHT & LIFE

Rosary Center, P.O. Box 3617, Portland, Oregon 97208

Subscription Rates:

United States	\$10.00 Per Year
Canada & Mexico	\$11.50 Per Year
Other Countries	\$12.50 Per Year

2 Novenas of Masses
in honor of

THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Nov. 30 - Dec. 8 — Dec. 9 - 17

TO BE OFFERED FOR YOUR INTENTIONS

THEOLOGY FOR THE LAITY

The Ten Commandments: Introduction Covenant and Commandment

By Father Reginald Martin, O.P.

THE GREAT COMMANDMENT

In St. Matthew's gospel account we read that a Pharisee, to test Jesus, asks him, "*Teacher, which is the great commandment of the law?*" Jesus replies:

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets." (Mt. 22.36)

This question occurs rather late in Matthew's account. Jesus is very close to falling into the hands of his enemies, and he must have felt quite sad to see this "test" as a sign of their unrelenting hostility. Nevertheless, he replies to the question with his usual patience, and his answer, one modern writer says, "laid down the complete definition of religion."

ECONOMY OF JESUS' REPLY, & ITS DEMANDS

We should remark two things in Jesus' reply. The first is its brevity; Jesus wastes no words. The law is a very simple matter; it may be summed up in a single word: love. And this is the second thing we must consider. Jesus is not describing the sentimental or romantic feeling we so often find on greeting cards. The love Jesus describes is total, demanding, and all consuming.

We should not be surprised that St. Paul echoes Jesus when he writes, "*The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery, you shall not kill'...and any other commandment are summed up in this sentence: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'.*" (Rom. 13. 9)

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS: THE FOUNDATION

The commandments Jesus and Paul refer to, of course, are what we call the Ten Commandments, the Decalogue or "Ten Words" God revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai. Like Jesus' reply to the Pharisee, God's words to Moses are concise and to the point. In the Books of Exodus and Deuteronomy, Moses will interpret and add to these simple and direct statements, and they will become the cornerstone for the entire moral framework of God's People in the Old Testament. In themselves, though, they could not be simpler or more direct. God had centuries of dealing with our limited attention; He knew how prone we are to stray from the point, so he made certain to state His case very clearly, without unnecessary details.

GOD'S WORDS & GOD'S WORD

And lest we ever forget that God's Words were intended for our guidance and improvement – and so that we might

have no excuse for ignoring them – God's Word took on our flesh and went through every moment of our lives. Not so that we could avoid the experience of being human, but to show us how to "get it right." Thus, our remarks, "...it is in the New Covenant in Jesus Christ that their full meaning will be revealed." (CCC, 2056)

THE GIFT OF THE COMMANDMENTS

The *Catechism* teaches that the Ten Commandments must be understood within the larger picture of God's great intervention in the History of His people, the Exodus. The Ten Commandments "*point out the conditions of a life freed from the slavery of sin*" (CCC, 2057), but they do so because they reflect the conditions of a people who have been freed from a life of slavery. "*The Decalogue is a path of life,*" the *Catechism* reminds us, because God freed the Israelites from subjection to their Egyptian taskmasters, thus giving them the freedom to yield themselves to Him.

We see this very clearly when we look at the commandment to "keep holy the Lord's day." This is an obligation that would be altogether impossible to fulfill if we did not have the liberty of a day without other demands. To keep God's day holy is a positive command – a command to "do" something, rather than refrain from an action. It is a privilege, and when we consider the many ways in which we fill our days (even the Lord's Day) we should remember the great honor we have received, the honor of a free people, to enjoy freely a day in the Lord's company.

In the Book of Deuteronomy we come to understand that the Ten Commandments set the seal on what God began with the Exodus. Moses calls the Israelites together and reminds them:

Not with our fathers did the Lord make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive this day. The Lord spoke with you face to face at the mountain, out of the midst of the fire, while I stood between the Lord and you.... (Deut. 5.3)

OUR RESPONSE IN LOVE

The law is God's gift, given when the Israelites acclaim the Lord to be their God and acknowledge themselves willing to live by his rule. In this way, the Ten Commandments are a reward for our willingness to embrace the sovereignty of God, and the *Catechism* observes:

The gift of the commandments and of the Law is part of the covenant God sealed with his own... after the people had committed themselves to

'do' all that the Lord has said, and to 'obey' it. The Decalogue is never handed on without first recalling the covenant. (CCC, 2061)

This covenant – the loving relation between God and His people – is the source of our moral life. It is not something we initiate; it is altogether God's gift, the result of His reaching out to us. One of the Church's early writers, reflecting on the Book of Exodus, said:

Since there was a passing from the paradise of freedom to the slavery of this world, in punishment for sin, the first phrase of the Decalogue, the first word of God's commandments, bears on freedom: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."

The Ten Commandments, the *Catechism* observes, "come in second place: they express the implications of belonging to God through the establishment of the covenant. Moral existence is a response to the Lord's loving initiative" (CCC, 2062). Moreover, it is a personal response. The *Catechism* remarks that God employs only first person singular pronouns in the Ten Commandments, "I" and "you."

A PERSONAL GIFT & A PERSONAL RESPONSE

This may be something we take for granted, but many of the world's religions do not share our belief in a God who takes such a personal interest in His creatures. Many non-Christians follow edifying moral codes, but these laws are the result of trial and error, experience, reflection, and hard work. As we read the words God has given us, and especially as we take them to heart, we are meant to understand that these words are the personal revelation of a God who wants to draw forth the very best of His creation.

A RESPONSE IN FREEDOM

Our surrender to the Ten Commandments is not – or should not be – the servile response of a prisoner who fears punishment, but that of a child who longs to carry out the will of a loving parent, understanding that the parent wants nothing except what will benefit the child and bring the child the greatest happiness. At the beginning of the 3rd Century, St. Irenaeus wrote:

The Lord prescribed love towards God and taught justice towards neighbor, so that man would be neither unjust, nor unworthy of God. Thus, through the Decalogue, God prepared man to become his friend and to live in harmony with his neighbor....

AN IRREVOCABLE RESPONSE

St. Irenaeus continues, reminding us that although God gave the Ten Commandments to His people under the Old Law, they have not been abolished under the New. Indeed, "...they have received amplification and development from the fact of the coming of the Lord in the flesh." Jesus' reply to the Pharisee who wished to test him is an elegant summary of the Ten Commandments. It is proof that He placed them at the center of the moral doctrine He came to share, to teach by the example of His word and life – and especially by the example of His unselfish death.

THE PROPER ORDER OF LOVE

Not surprisingly, Jesus' answer to the Pharisee makes clear that God must take first place in our moral universe. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is," Jesus says, "the great and first commandment," and summarizes the first three of the Commandments of the Decalogue. When Jesus continues, "And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself," He gives a fair summary of the remaining seven Commandments.

The *Catechism* expresses this very succinctly,

The Ten Commandments state what is required in the love of God and love of neighbor. The first three concern love of God and the other seven love of neighbor (CCC, 2067).

St. Augustine echoed this very imaginatively when he preached:

As charity comprises the two commandments to which the Lord related the whole Law and the prophets... so the Ten Commandments were themselves given on two tablets. Three were written on one tablet and seven on the other.

We shall never know whether Augustine was right in his conjecture regarding the arrangement of the text on the tablets Moses brought down from Mount Sinai, but we may be certain he was absolutely correct in his judgment that the Ten Commandments form one unified whole.

Each "word" refers to each of the others and to all of them; they reciprocally condition one another; the two tablets shed light on one another; they form an organic unity. To transgress one is to infringe all the others. One cannot honor another person without blessing God his Creator. One cannot adore God without loving all men, his creatures. The Decalogue brings man's religious and social life into unity. (CCC, 2069)

THE POWER OF LOVE

This reflects the theology we have received from St. John, who taught that love is "...not that we have loved God but that he loved us..." (1 Jn. 4.10) God, as we have seen earlier, initiates the loving relationship with us that enables us to love God in return. The result is that we come to love God's creatures with a love that, over time, comes more and more to resemble God's own love. The first of the creatures we love, of course, is the one we know most intimately: *ourselves*. This may sound selfish – indeed, supermarket tabloids are filled with tales of individuals filled with an overweening self-love. This, we may be certain, is something entirely different from the love we owe ourselves as God's creatures.

Once we have learned to love ourselves, we may then turn to one another, and finally, to the world around us. Each act of love touches the world with God's love for us, and to reach out in love to another is to reflect the love that God instilled in us; to turn away from another is to besmirch the image of that love.

THE COMMANDMENTS' POWER TO TRANSFORM

Our *Catechism* rather generously assures us that although the Ten Commandments belong to God's

revelation, “they bring to light the essential duties, and therefore, the fundamental rights inherent in the nature of the human person” (CCC, 2070). As we look at ourselves and the ease with which we fall into sin, we may question whether these are truly “inherent,” and whether we would ever – without the prompting of grace, manifested in gifts such as the Ten Commandments – realize how noble we are, and what this nobility demands of us.

When our First Parents closed their eyes in the garden, one of the many realities we grew blind to was our inherent worth and goodness. The Ten Commandments helps cure that infirmity. St. Irenaeus preached:

From the beginning, God had implanted in the heart of man the precepts of the natural law. Then he was content to remind him of them. This was the Decalogue.

A MOST SERIOUS REMINDER

Because the Ten Commandments describe the essential relations that unite us to God and one another, and because God is their author and source, the Ten Commandments describe the most serious relations in our lives. They cannot change, and they oblige every person in every place and circumstance. “*The Ten Commandments are engraved by God in the human heart*” (CCC, 2072). ■

(continued from page 1)

Like John the Baptist, the Virgin Mary is our model in humility. When the angel tells her she is to be the mother of God’s son she says, “Of course. I am, after all, the Lord’s servant.” But later, in the *Magnificat*, when she speaks of her lowliness as God’s servant, she tells us that to be God’s slave – to give up our will to embrace God’s will – means sharing in God’s triumphs and his glory.

The gospel is a story told about us. Each of the individuals we encounter in the gospel accounts is a reflection of us, and shows us what we ought to be doing – or what we ought to be avoiding. Mary is the model for the Church, so she is our model in all things. She is the only person present to witness all the important events in the life of Jesus – and the beginning of the Church at Pentecost – so to find her in the Scripture is to find ourselves, sharing her quiet but powerful witness to God’s Word, the primary exemplar of our Christian life.

Knox translated the Bible, so he is a careful observer of the language individuals speak. He makes a wonderful comparison between Elizabeth and Mary. Elizabeth’s excitement, he says, “...makes a sort of agitated antiphon to usher in the marble-like phrases of the *Magnificat*.” Marble-like those phrases are, indeed. If we look at the words of Mary’s *Magnificat*, we see that the hymn begins in the first person – “*My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord...*” But two sentences into the hymn, the language becomes general, and the hymn becomes a tribute to God’s justice, loving kindness, and mercy for all his people.

Knox ends his reflection – and his book – by putting words of advice in Mary’s mouth. She gives us two “don’ts.” Don’t protest or blame others if we can’t have what we want and have to put up with the “next best.” And don’t carry on if it seems like our prayers aren’t being answered. “And in everything you do the less you appear the better.” ■

NEWS ON FR. DUFFNER

As he approaches his ninety-ninth birthday, our beloved Fr. Duffner is showing the inevitable signs of wear. Which is not to say he has lost interest in the Rosary Confraternity ministry he directed for so many years. Far from it! Although he is slowing down, he continues to come to the Rosary Center each afternoon to cheer our staff and lend such practical assistance.

Did you ever wonder who enters all the names into the Rosary Confraternity register? Fr. Duffner spends literally hours at this labor of love, entering approximately 250 names into the book each week with perfect handwriting!

So that he can enjoy better care, Fr. Duffner has moved across the street from the Rosary Center, into a skilled-nursing facility. He is, thus, able to look down on his beloved Rosary Center and the Holy Rosary Parish over which he presided with love, as pastor, for so many years. Because he is so close by, he can join the Rosary Center staff and the Dominican community whenever he “feels up” to making the trip across the street – and we are able to visit him with great regularity.

Fr. Duffner remains the heart and soul of the Dominicans’ Rosary ministry. Please keep him in your prayers as we join Mary on her pilgrimage through Advent.



CHRISTMAS GIFT SUGGESTIONS

Celebrating Mary - This book contains one hundred prayers and readings to foster and deepen our devotion to God’s mother. The volume includes reflections by Julian of Norwich, St. Bernard, St. Bridget of Sweden, St. Alphonsus, St. Francis de Sales, and Gerard Manley Hopkins.

The Look and Find Book of Bible Stories - This book, designed for children, invites young readers to learn their Old and New Testament by identifying objects, animals and individuals on each page.

Pope Francis Speaks to Our Hearts - This pocket-sized volume contains excerpts from the homilies and addresses His Holiness has given since becoming Pope.

The Gift of St. John Paul II - This book, by American Cardinal Donald Wuerl, explores the wealth of the Pontiff’s teaching, and invites the reader to explore ways to apply them in everyday life.

Praying with St. John Paul II - This book contains devotions dear to the saint, with biographical details and other reflections that make the prayers easily accessible to the reader.

Pope John Paul II, Words to Live By - This is perpetual calendar, which will enable faithful Catholics to meditate each day upon the wisdom of the former Pope, and the Church’s new saint.

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