

Commandments of Compassion

Many of us grew up thinking of the Ten Commandments as God saying “Don’t do this or don’t do that.” We thought, “God made the rules and if we break them, we lose the game.” We may never have taken the time to think about why God gave us the commandments.

So let’s think about God and the reason He gave us, what I like to think of as, His commandments of compassion. First off, God is love. He is a loving Father. He is not saying you can’t do this or don’t do that to limit our freedom. When we sin, we hurt ourselves, we hurt our relationship with God, we hurt our relationships with each other, and, worst of all, we put our family and friends in the position of having to either accept our sinful lifestyle or break our relationship.

God wants us to be happy. If we think of God in this way, then we can see that His commandments are “commandments of compassion”

Relationships

Now, the commandments have to do with relationships. The first three commandments have to do with our relationship with God. The next seven have to do with our relationships with other people.

So let’s talk about the first three and our relationship with God. The first one says to have no other gods beside Me. What happens when our priorities are out of order? What happens if money, or work, or alcohol becomes our god? It brings loneliness, pain, sorrow, or disillusionment into our lives. We end up separating ourselves from the ones who love us, we become lost. We are unhappy.

The second commandment says to not take the name of the Lord, your God, in vain. . . When we lose reverence and respect for God, it creates a hole in our hearts and we end up losing respect for ourselves. We end up with a very empty feeling, a feeling of deep loneliness.

The third commandment says to keep holy the Sabbath. God knows that we all need to regroup and recharge sometimes. If we don’t, we get stressed out and we become mean and cranky and unpleasant to be around. We need to receive Christ on Sunday, to be a part of a community, to be with others who share our faith and to fellowship with them, after attending holy Mass.

If our relationship with God is not right, we are lost ...we hurt ... we are sad ... God does not want us to experience that, so He gave us the first three commandments of compassion to help us in our relationship with Him.

Honor thy Father and thy Mother

The fourth commandment says to honor your father and your mother. Are we happy if we don’t get along with our parents? A good relationship with our parents is a blessing and a joy in our lives and in the lives of our parents. It is a great gift. We honor our parents by spending time with them talking with them and listening to what they have to say. If we did this, we would be much happier.

The fifth, sixth and seventh commandments: do not kill, do not commit adultery, do not steal. If we break these commandments, what happens? People die ... People hurt ... People go to jail ... Families break up ... Children suffer ... Parents suffer ... Our friends and relatives are embarrassed

and ashamed. We all suffer ... Everyone hurts deeply. God does not want us to experience this pain!

The eighth commandment: do not bear false witness against your neighbor. This one causes more pain than you might first think. I've seen people quit jobs over it. Marriages have been broken up over it. People's reputations destroyed over it. Gossip kills ... we all need to remember this when we are tempted to talk about someone else.

Greed and Envy

The ninth and tenth commandment: Do not covet your neighbor's goods or your neighbor's wife. Surprisingly, these two have a great deal to do with our happiness.

Let me give you three examples of couples and you tell me if they are happy or not.

The first one is a former college football player, now married to a former Miss Texas. They have great jobs and a combined income of a half-million dollars a year. They have a big house, worth about one million dollars. He drives a new BMW and she drives a new Lexus. Are they happy? ... Maybe.

Our second couple lives right next door. He is an all-pro football player. She is a former Miss America. They have great careers and a combined income of twenty million per year and they live in a forty million dollar mansion. He drives a new Ferrari and she drives a new Rolls Royce. Are they happy? ... Maybe.

Now what if I told you that with our first couple, the guy always wanted to play pro football and never made it, and is jealous of his neighbor the all-pro football player. What if I told you that Miss Texas lost the Miss America pageant to the woman next door? What if that first couple really wished they made even more money and had an even bigger house and more expensive cars?

Now, do you think that our first couple is happy? ... No! ... They are probably miserable. What about the all-pro guy and his Miss America wife, with the mansion, the Ferrari and the Rolls Royce? What if he really desires his neighbor's wife, Miss Texas so much so that he neglects his own wife? What if all she can think about is the guy next door and neglects her husband? Are they happy? ... It's very unlikely.

Now to the third couple. Both barely graduated high school, and neither went to college. Mom stays home and cares for dad and the children. Dad's total income is twenty-four thousand a year. They have a small home on which they make payments they can barely afford. They have one car that is fifteen years old and they have three children. Are they happy? Possibly.

Gratitude

Now what if I told you that they were each the first in their family to graduate high school. That they each can't believe that they would marry someone that would love them so much. They always wanted children and never thought they would be able to have any and now they have hopes of their children getting an education and having a happy and successful life. What if they are both grateful for what they have? What if they are the first in their family to own a home and not rent? Now, do you think they are happy? I think they are probably much more happy than the other two couples.

We shouldn't make ourselves sick and unhappy desiring what we don't have. Sometimes

happiness is being satisfied with what we have.

Sometimes the key to happiness is having an attitude of gratitude. We need to be thankful for the gifts that God has given us. During Lent, as we fast and make sacrifices, we should stop and take some time to look at what is important in our lives. Look at what we have been blessed with ... our friends ... our families...our church community. We need to respond to each other out of love and gratitude.

The fasting of Lent and the suffering of the cross leads to “Easter Sunday and the Resurrection.” The sacrifice and gift of Jesus is that of a loving and compassionate God. God loves us and gives us commandments of compassion to show us how to be happy! And He gives us His Son for our salvation.