

Homily.22OrdB.8.29.30  
Saint Bernard Church  
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Today's readings bring up what can be an uncomfortable subject for many of us modern Americans: God's commandments, His laws.

We like to have a say in our laws. If we don't like the laws that are made, we try to vote out the people that made them. And, for some of us, if we don't like the laws, maybe we don't obey them, either.

But God's laws, and the teachings of the Church, are just given to us, and we're expected to obey.

One of my kids, when he was a teenager, didn't like rules that were given to him, so he decided he would live by his own rules. This didn't work too well for him in high school, but he thought it would work great for him when he went to college 1,600 miles away at the University of Montana.

A funny thing happened to him his first year out there. While we would have preferred he be in church every Sunday, he spent almost every weekend in the mountains. After doing this for several months, a light bulb went off in his head.

He realized that, in the mountains, in nature, there are objective rules you have to follow. If you don't follow them, if you make up your own rules, you perish. This realization was the first step in his gradual acceptance of objective standards of faith and morality. Today, he is a very solid Catholic, husband and father. And he is truly and deeply happy.

Something that a lot of us have forgotten or never knew is that many of God's rules aren't just in the Bible or the teachings of the Church.

They're in nature.

The Greek philosophers, like Heraclitus, Socrates and Aristotle, believed that, by applying reason to the study of nature, human beings could discover universal truths. They believed that we lived in a rational universe ordered by a divine intellect. They believed that the order in the universe is inscribed in every human soul.

Cicero, a Roman, picked up on this when he wrote:

“True law is reason, right and natural, commanding people to fulfill their obligation and prohibiting and deterring them from doing wrong. Its validity is universal; it is immediate and eternal...There will not be one law in Rome, one in Athens, or one now and one later, but all nations will be subject all the time to this one changeless and everlasting law: for God, who is its author and promulgator, is always the sole author and sovereign of mankind.”

Some examples of principles derived from applying reason in the study of nature are the dignity of the human person, preservation of human life, marriage of man and woman, having children, educating the young, knowing the truth about God and preserving social harmony. Over time, these principles became the foundation for democracies.

In the Old Testament, God confirms the understanding of the Greek and Roman philosophers on the subject of natural law. He made it clear to the Jewish people that much of His laws were imprinted on their hearts, their minds and their souls.

In Genesis, we are told that human beings are made in God’s image. Therefore, we can know a lot about God and what He expects from us by studying the characteristics of males and females.

I love this passage from the Book of Wisdom, Chapter 13:

“Foolish by nature were all who were in ignorance of God, and who from the good things seen did not succeed in knowing the one who is, and from studying the works did not discern the artisan. Instead, they considered fire, or wind, or the stars, or the mighty water to be gods...If they were struck by their might and energy, let them realize from these things how much more powerful is the one who made them. For from the greatness and the beauty of created things their original author, by analogy, is seen.”

So if creation tells us about the Creator, and human beings are created in God’s image, then Jesus, God’s own Son, perfectly reveals to all of humanity what God wants from us.

Listen carefully to this passage from the Letter to the Colossians which tells us in very powerful language about the relationship between Jesus and the created world:

“He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. **For in him were created all things in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible... all things were created through him and for him...in him all things hold together.**”

This means that every human being is wired for Jesus. Our mission, our purpose, our values, our decisions, our actions, are all to be modeled after Jesus Christ.

It also means that anything on earth that is not of Christ will not last. It might go on for centuries, but it will eventually die out.

This is why the Church, unlike any other organization on earth, makes it its business to study every aspect of life on earth, including the latest developments. That's to determine what is of Christ and what is not.

Obeying the laws of God and the Church are not a burden. These laws are an expression of God's love for humanity. They exist for our good.

When we are humble enough to follow God's laws, we experience stability, happiness and true freedom. There is a positive order to our lives. As Jesus has told us "The truth will set you free."

Anything less than the truth, then, will leave us less free. Rejecting God's laws, His truth and His sovereignty over our lives, will lead us away from who we were created to be.

It's very obvious that our modern culture in the U. S. has taken a pass on obeying God's laws. Abortion, promiscuity, dishonesty, greed, selfishness are all growing examples of what happens when large numbers of us push God away.

Further evidence of the consequences of not following God's laws is the alarming increase in serious psychological distress in the United States. Nearly 20% of the adult population suffer some type of mental illness.

Among youth, the number of children and teens admitted to hospitals for thoughts of self-harm has more than doubled in the last 10 years.

We push Jesus away at our own peril, seeking a false freedom, which then leads to increased anxiety, stress, confusion, addiction, loneliness and depression.

But when we commit to loving and obeying Jesus, acknowledging him as our Lord and Master, we will experience the truth of this passage from Psalm 19:

Psalm 19:8-12 The law of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul. The decree of the LORD is trustworthy, giving wisdom to the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart. The command of the LORD is clear, enlightening the eye... The statutes of the LORD are true, all of them just; more desirable than gold,...sweeter also than honey. By them your servant is warned; obeying them brings much reward.