

ELEVEN COMMANDMENTS (Jn 13:31-35)

An elderly woman who lived on her own and was pretty independent returned home from the hospital after undergoing major surgery. One of the instructions from her doctor upon her discharge was to take things easy for two weeks and, above all, not to go up and down the stairs until her next visit. Two weeks later, the doctor examined her and noted that she was healing pretty quickly, so he told her that she could safely go up and down the stairs once again. She replied, "Thank goodness! I was getting tired of climbing up and down the drainpipe to get to my sewing room."

That woman's response to her doctor's instructions is pretty similar to our response to Jesus' instructions at times. We come to church and hear Jesus' commands, but we have a mind of our own so we look for a way around them -- a loophole or a rationalization or a justification for doing as we please rather than as we are commanded. There is a poem that goes:

*Oh God,
The bumper sticker says, "Smile if you love Jesus."
So I smiled all day long ... and people thought I was odd.
The bumper sticker said, "Honk if you love Jesus."
So I honked ... and the policeman said I was disturbing the peace.
The bumper sticker said, "Wave if you love Jesus."
So I waved with both hands, lost control of the car, and crashed into a telephone pole.
Oh God,
If I cannot smile or honk or even wave
How will Jesus know I love him?
Oh, child of God!
Mere smiling or honking or waving is too easy.*

If you really want to love Jesus, you must love one another!

If someone were to ask us how many commandments there are, we would probably automatically answer, "Ten." You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your soul and with all your strength. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. Remember to keep holy the Lord's day. Honor your father and your mother. You shall not steal. You shall not kill. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not bear false witness (meaning you shall not lie). You shall not covet your neighbor's wife. You shall not covet your neighbor's goods.

For those of us who just heard today's gospel, the correct answer to the question of how many commandments there are is **ELEVEN**. Jesus gave us one additional commandment: **love one another as I have loved you**. That com-

mandment is different than the other original 10 and takes them to their logical conclusion --- to love. By his life Jesus showed us how to love and then directed us to go and do the same:

feed the poor; heal the sick; comfort the grieving; forgive those who wrong us; do not resort to violence; pray to God always; know and live the faith we profess each and every day. Jesus' life was known for the things which he did out of love for others and for God. His life was not just words, but also actions living out those words. If he had just left us with his teachings, our lives would have been greatly enriched and would have provided us with much needed interpretation of God's commands to us. But as it is, he left us with his actions, his signs of what those words meant, so that we would not have any doubts as to what he meant --- no loopholes or drainpipes to climb up and down. Every action of our lives is measured against what Jesus did.

Sometimes we struggle to understand who God is because we look up there or because we think that God is far away. We call Him by fancy, high and mighty names and make Him into something that is far beyond us. Yet all the while He is right here with us, in us, around us. God is love, and looking for God is like looking for the air we breathe. Love is all around us. Once we come to recognize God as love, we see Him everywhere, for God is in all of life, even in the messiness of life. Jesus' life was messy, and he saw God in that messiness. He sits down at a well to get a drink in Samaria, which is foreign territory, and up comes a woman who is anything but ritually pure. And Jesus finds love in the situation offering her a drink of eternal life-giving water. A group of soldiers comes looking for Jesus in the dark of night. Rather than giving in to fear and resorting to violence, he submits to them and even heals the ear of one of those who was there to arrest him, someone injured by Peter, his right hand man.

That is the love which he commands us to live, the 11th commandment --- "love one another as I have loved you." We, too, are the Samaritan woman at the well, ritually impure and not worthy of God's love, but God gives us to drink of His love anyway because we **are** His children. We, too, are the slave who has been injured in some way, maybe even by someone who is a leader in the Church. And God's healing love is given to us. Jesus' command calls us to give others a drink, to offer a healing touch to one another. No longer can we simply walk by or ignore someone in need for the 11th commandment directs us otherwise.

In closing, I offer a prayer by St. Theresa of Avila:

"Christ has no hands but yours;
Christ has no body but yours;
No hands, no feet on earth but yours.
Yours are the eyes through which He looks compassion on the world.

Yours are the feet with which He walks to do good.
Yours are the hands with which He blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands,
Yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes,
Yours are His body.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours."

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