

What thoughts come to mind when you hear the words, “law and morality?” Well if you’re like my mom and you love the popular TV series “Law and Order” then you might get excited when you hear these words. But I would argue that when many in our society hear the words “law and morality” they seem to cringe, given that these terms have sadly gained a mostly negative connotation in our popular culture.

Tragically, our Catholic faith tends to get falsely stereotyped for being “obsessed” with burdensome rules and regulations that are somehow designed to keep us from being free and happy, as if God were some “mean bully or slave master.” But brothers and sisters, *nothing could be farther from the Truth!*

Through today’s Liturgy of the Word, the Lord reminds us of the authentic nature of the law and morality. And just for the sake of context, when I use the term “law” in this homily, I’m referring to the moral law in general rather than civil law—although civil law *should* prudentially reflect the moral law! Brothers and sisters, the Lord wants to remind us today that morality and the law are *not about burdensome rules and regulations—but rather the moral law is all about*

*relationship*. And *specifically*, the moral law is all about our relationship with *God and others*. So if morality and the law are all about *relationship*, then it's safe to say that morality and the law are all about *love*—*indeed, the moral law itself is love*—“love” properly understood as the stable disposition of the will where one freely seeks the *authentic good* of another *purely* for the sake of the other.

As human beings, we're *created for relationship with God and others*. So “morality” can simply be defined as “*how* we love God and others.” And it must be emphasized that love of God *and* love of others *are inseparably one! If we first love God above all things, then we must also love others as God loves them!*

Through His inspired Word, God gives us further clarity on the authentic, relational meaning of the law and morality. In St. Paul's Letter to the Romans 10:13, the Lord reveals that “*love is the fulfillment of the law.*” In John 14:15, our Lord Jesus declares, “*If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.*” And finally, in the First Letter of John 5:3, the Lord explains, “For the love of God is this, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are *not* burdensome...”

Therefore, the 10 Commandments, which were just enumerated in the first reading, *along* with Christ's moral teachings and those of His Catholic Church, *are all about love: love of God and love of neighbor*— and *together* they form the path to holiness. So the 10 Commandments, which help to constitute the essence of morality, are *not obstacles to freedom and happiness, but rather they are the blueprints for freedom and happiness!* It's in loving God and others with our whole being that we're truly liberated and discover a peace and a joy that the world cannot give! It's in loving God and others by honoring His commandments that we find the fullness of life!

Brothers and sisters, today's Liturgy of the Word is designed to give us a clear progression when it comes to the moral law. In the first reading from the Book of Exodus, we hear that the moral law is first given to us in the form of the 10 Commandments, which are entirely centered on the love of God *and* neighbor. Then in the second reading and the Gospel, we come to understand that the moral law is not simply an abstract ideal or principle, but rather a *Person!* Our Lord Jesus Christ

*is Wisdom and the Moral Law incarnate!* Given that Jesus is *Love itself in the flesh, He is the perfect embodiment of the Law!*

Now once we understand *Who Jesus is* as the Moral Law incarnate, as Love-in-the-flesh, *then* we can better understand why Jesus did what He did in today's Gospel. If you want evidence that our Lord Jesus isn't some "amoral flower patch kid" or some "relativistic New Age guru who doesn't care what we believe or what we do" then simply consider today's Gospel: the Son of God, filled with righteous anger, literally *made a whip out of cords and overturned tables* in order to drive the money-changers out of His Father's Temple. I mean, that's pretty intense.

And just to be clear, Jesus didn't do this because He's some mean, monstrous dictator—no, He did this out of "tough love" for the people and certainly out of love for His Father. Just as a parent disciplines their child out of love for them, so also in today's Gospel Jesus is disciplining the people out of love for them in order to correct them and remind them that the Temple is a sacred house of prayer.

Brothers and sisters, just as Jesus cleansed the Temple in Jerusalem of selfishness, greed, and envy, so He also seeks to cleanse us—who are *also* Temples of the Holy Spirit—of any sins that are enslaving us or violating our own dignity. Our Savior seeks to lovingly cleanse and purify our hearts with His mercy so that we can love Him and others with every fiber of our being and become the best version of ourselves—so that we can fulfill our greatest potential as beloved children of our Heavenly Father.

And our hearts can only become pure when they're centered on Jesus. Our hearts become pure when we allow Jesus, Who *is the Moral Law Incarnate*, to dwell within our hearts and to liberate us from whatever sins are plaguing us. So I think today we need to ask ourselves: what do I need to be cleansed of in my life? Where *specifically* do I need our Lord Jesus to cleanse and purify me? Do I need to be cleansed of wrath or vengeance, greed, lust, envy, pride, sloth or spiritual laziness, or gluttony? Where specifically do I need to freely cooperate with the grace of Christ when it comes to the cleansing and purification of my life and my heart?

So as we prepare to worship and receive our Lord Jesus Christ in the Most Holy Eucharist—our merciful Savior Who *is* the Moral Law *itself*, let us humbly pray: Lord, cleanse and purify my heart, so that everything I think, say, and do may be for the love of You. Amen.