

LENT 2017 - day 15 – 22nd March

Deuteronomy 4:1

So now, Israel, give heed to the statutes and ordinances that I am teaching you to observe, so that you may occupy the land that the Lord, the God of your ancestors, is giving you.

For many people, laws, rules and regulations are restrictions of freedom -

especially depending on your maturity. If you're immature, every decree, every regulation and every law looks as if it is a challenge to you. So you have to find a way to break it. Therefore, because of immaturity, with the law comes punishment.

Punishment is what keeps people from breaking the law. Otherwise a lot of people will break many laws.

We have policemen in uniform because they're reminding you you're going to be punished if you break the law. Those days the priest in charge of discipline in our school walked around with a cane in his hand. That was to remind us that if we broke the law we would be punished. In immature circumstances, that's the only way to control people. That's why we have traffic laws and punishments and bribes. The whole system is included because of human immaturity.

In actual fact, God is telling us that His laws are not for punishment, not for restriction - but for freedom. If you follow God's law in your life, you will live a totally free and liberated life. If you're wounded and damaged, His law looks like a restriction. So for a person who has no control over their sexual urge, the law of having only one relationship in marriage and only being married to one person is a serious restriction. This is because of the internal problem.

The answer is God's healing so that His laws really free us. God's decrees and laws are given so that we may grow from immaturity to maturity. As you mature, becoming faithful is a joy.

So it is the same in a marriage. Today they tell us that in our countries the divorce rate is much lower than in western countries. We are happy, but the real problem is why? Because of social pressures. Among the elite of society in Colombo, divorce, separation and living with other people is no longer a problem. Therefore the rate is increased. In the villages and other places it is not so, because they have not gone there yet. For sure we will come there because we are journeying in that direction. But trying to keep people fearful and primitive because they will break the law is a waste of time. We say, "Let's keep them uneducated and unenlightened. Then they will have good marriages."

God has a better solution. When you grow in your knowledge of God, your understanding of marriage changes and you are faithful out of freedom, you're together with your partner out of love and choice. Then your relationship becomes blessed. You can have a long, blessed marriage if you grow in your knowledge of the Lord - not because you keep people primitive, uneducated and unenlightened.

We say the same thing about religion. "Keep the laity quiet, then you won't have any problems. They

will do what you tell them and they will be like little lambs." But in actual fact we are denying growth and development because of trouble. So I'm learning from my grandson. If you tell him not to do something he will ask why. Then you have to explain it. You can use authority and say, "Shut up, you better do it." I feel sorry because I would have used it those days. Now we are older and we enjoy this. When you have the dialogue and they come to enlightenment there is joy. Those days you're threatened, so you say, "Shut up. I told you to do this - I am your father." Using authority in an immature way because we don't know what else to do.

The laws of God are not to suppress anybody; the laws of God are to enlighten and make people grow into complete freedom. It is only the direction given to life.

Ultimately we do it out of joy. Marriage is the most beautiful example of it. You're faithful not because somebody is watching, not because you're going to have a headache if you don't, not because you're thinking of how the divorce proceedings will be. There is an ad on Indian television - the divorce is going on and they are negotiating and arguing bitterly about sharing stuff. They leave the lawyer's office and when they come out they see this beautiful electronic toilet and then they say, "Let's stay together - we can't separate."

But they are using psychology and are telling you what's happening in the world. It's only about your advantage and not having pain. You're not growing into maturity. When you're growing into maturity, the laws of God liberate you.

Deuteronomy 4:5

See, just as the Lord my God has charged me, I now teach you statutes and ordinances for you to observe in the land that you are about to enter and occupy.

He is saying, "If you follow those ways you'll be blessed." The deeper blessing is when you allow the Lord to form you and mature you to agree to the laws of God - not to find a loophole everywhere.

Deuteronomy 4:6

You must observe them diligently, for this will show your wisdom and discernment to the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and discerning people!"

I want to take the word discernment out from this text. It seems to be an important factor that we need to talk about at this stage. People have gone beyond solving their problems and asking God for help and now many people are on a serious journey with God. When you get on a serious journey with God, you have another issue. The other issue is when you are hearing the voice of God, remember our ego and flesh never leave us - it only changes its form inside us. Earlier, our ego and flesh aided by our friend, the devil, was tempting us to walk away from God and to walk into sin.

Now we have struggled with it, decided to give our life to the Lord and walk in the ways of God. That does not mean your temptation is over. Now it is coming in another form. That's why you need discernment. The temptation comes from within us as well as from the world around us.

The temptation is to think that what I am thinking is also the same as the voice of God. After some time you quietly begin to think that what you are hearing is the voice of God. "This

one is a fool, that one is an idiot. Only I can hear His voice." That's why the church in her wisdom speaks about discerning God's voice through the community. It is only in the Catholic Church you get that. You discern, you submit and you allow yourself to be protected by obedience to the human voice that is coming through the church. If you don't do that we become elitist and we can easily break up. If you look at the traditions of Christianity in the world today - have you ever wondered - where do you find most of the saints? You find them in the Catholic Church. You also find enough rascals as well, but you also find the saints. But if you look outside you'll see the saints are rare and few because many never travel to the depths. When they face this issue they walk by themselves.

Discerning is so important. Not only are we ready to obey God's word but we are ready to discern His voice. When you start working together and discerning His voice, we are all the time protected. I myself continue to do it. Thoughts, ideas, dreams are discerned with others. It is not just with people who are working below me but also with the authority of the church. I discern with them and say, "This is what I think the Lord is asking us to do," and we open it up. Then when a guidance is given, immediately we surrender to it so that you grow in your unity together.

We are having these issues cropping up. Once I told somebody, "You better stop disturbing the meetings with the way you are behaving." This person told me, "Are you telling me to obey you and not listen to the Holy Spirit?" That's the next step in problems. I told this person, "I'll sort that out. Tell God that Lalith Thaththa is the one who told me to stop it and I had to stop it, and I'll settle it with Him the day I meet Him." Each one starts doing things and behaving and acting, convinced that they are hearing God's voice - we are going to have bedlam - not a symphony, but a cacophony.

That's what happens in many other non-catholic traditions. People simply walk away and do their own thing. But we work together, we suffer in surrender and obedience. Otherwise we won't be able to go further as we go deeper. Each one must hear the voice of God.

When you hear the voice of God you have this problem. The answer is not to keep them juvenile or to keep them like children and say, "You don't hear it - I will tell you. You be like good children, I'll tap you on the head once in a way and tell you what God is saying." That's not the answer. The answer is to grow into maturity, where we are all hearing the voice of God and led by the harmony of the Holy Spirit.

But there is a way and a system that has been worked out in the church and that way is called discernment. I am going to teach this in the future, because a lot of people go and discern with their friends. "You like me, I like you, can you please tell me what to do? This is what I'm feeling." There is a real life example like that where one person was encouraged to have a relationship that was completely sinful and that person realized it. I was talking to this person and I asked this person if they didn't realize it was sinful. "No, it was a revelation from the Holy Spirit to the person who was discerning for me." Nobody can discern for you against the commandments of God. When you say do not commit adultery you can be sure God won't tell you to commit adultery. We need to grow. The commandments are like the torches of discernment and with each one, we are guided by the Holy Spirit.

Deuteronomy 4:9

But take care and watch yourselves closely, so as neither to forget the things that your eyes have seen nor to let them slip from your mind all the days of your life; make them known to your children and your children's children--

That is the primary duty we have. In the western countries there is a big issue: Parents are no longer teaching Christianity to their children. They are saying, "Let them choose when they are adults."

It's like not sending them to school and then saying let them choose whether they want to be educated or not. Sometimes it's not one generation but now you get three generations like that. For them, immorality is normal and faithfulness is abnormal. It has all turned upside down. It's a terrible crisis that people are going through from generation to generation.

If you are parents, our first responsibility is to pass on the faith to our children. I am calling on the fathers - that is the father's duty and not the mother's. We fathers like to take leadership and tell people what to do. We like to be the chairman of the house - "You cook, you clean and I'm moving the ship on the armchair." That's not the call. Leadership means you take responsibility. When you take the responsibility of spirituality your children will not have the crisis of leaving God.

Thank God we learnt as we got married. We learnt to give them leadership, and today our children are fully in the journey because of that, because they look at the father. I can tell you one of the main reasons I never took religion seriously was because of my own father. He loved the church, he served the bishop, he did cases free for them - but whenever the mass was on, he was outside. I thought real, strong men don't need God - they only serve Him out of a grateful heart. Only the weak ones go inside. Only now I'm understanding what took place. That's what happened. We need to give it to our children.

We will go to the gospel:

Matthew 5:17-18

Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.

Jesus is saying, "I have come to fulfill the law." But his solution is not external, but internal. He doesn't reduce the bar of the commandments of God so that anyone can jump over it. "Poor fellows, they can't wait without committing adultery - let's give them three or four wives." He is not lowering the bar to make the law approachable. He is doing it the other way around. He is doing something inside us that the law becomes possible from within.

That's why we need an intimacy with the Lord. First He gives us forgiveness of sin - the damage that has happened to us because we have not lived according to the laws of God. He forgives us and then He fills us with the Holy Spirit. Then He Himself comes to live inside us. Then when both of them come to live inside us and give us a relationship and a security - fulfilling the law becomes effortless. It's not about changing the law to fit the society, it's not about lowering the bar because nobody can do it. It's about being transformed from within so deeply that the law becomes your light.

Let's change in a special way. Instead of justifying what we can't do and saying, "Nobody is expected to do this," come to the Lord with it. His forgiveness, His love, His relationship with you will lift you above the law.

Yesterday I spoke about forgiveness. Someone came and said, "It is so impossible to forgive." But that doesn't mean we can justify unforgiveness. What it means is, you can come as you are to the Lord and say, "Lord, I am unable to forgive. Lord, I can't! But I want to be faithful to your commands." Surrender and say, "Lord, you come and do this within me." Then allow the Holy Spirit to empower you to do it.

When you do that, then the law is fulfilled through people who walk with God. Many Christians are confused because on one hand is the freedom from the law that St. Paul is talking about. A lot of people think freedom from the law means that if you believe it's enough. While the church brought from the letter of St. James that faith must be shown by works, the Protestants, through Luther, brought out the thinking that justification only by faith.

Little by little they began to say, "If you believe, what you do doesn't really matter." You have believed in the forgiveness of God, in His mercy. So the bar became lower. It happened even to some of our martyrs. Some martyrs who were holy their whole life, when they came to the death sentence, they believed that if you die for the faith you were going straight to heaven. In the last days they let themselves go and did all kinds of things, because they said, "I am going to die for the faith."

You can suddenly realize that they were never really converted. The flesh was only controlled. Their inner being was not transformed. They were controlling themselves because they wanted to go to heaven. Today if you release law and punishment, the same thing will happen to people. They haven't matured into this place. That place is that the law is the most perfect, beautiful place to be in. I have the freedom and I choose the law, because the Lord is doing something inside of me.

Let me read from this beautiful reflection from Henri Nouwen, claiming the sacredness of our being: *Are we friends with ourselves? Do we love who we are? These are important questions because we can't develop good friendships with others unless we have befriended our own selves.*

If you don't have a friendship with your own self, you're not going to have a good friendship with anybody else. That's why many people are angry with so many people - because they have their own internal issues.

How then, do we befriend ourselves? We have to start by acknowledging the truth of ourselves. We are beautiful, but also limited; rich, but also poor; generous, but also worried about our security. Yet, beyond all that, we are people with souls, sparks of the divine. To acknowledge the truth of ourselves is to claim the sacredness of our being.

We have to accept that on one hand, we have these limitations and it is a part of us. But that is not all who we are. We also have the sacred spark within us - the Holy Spirit, the indwelling presence of Jesus and that's why we have hope in the middle of the struggle.

To acknowledge the truth of ourselves is to claim the sacredness of our being without fully understanding it. Our deepest being escapes our own mental or emotional grasp. Be comfortable because you can't understand who you are. Be comfortable with your limitation because the sacred is also present inside of you. That's when you become relaxed. You don't have to analyze and understand to solve the problem, because that is self-effort. With your weakness co-exists the sacredness of the presence of your God living inside you

But when we trust that our souls are embraced by a loving God, we can befriend ourselves and reach out to others in loving relationships.

When you are embraced by a loving God - The biggest obstacle to that embrace is self-analysis. "I'm terrible, I'm doing this, I'm doing that." When I feel terrible about myself then I think I'm really holy. The

Lord says, "Look. I also live inside you and you're beautiful to me." As you relax and allow Him to embrace you, dealing with the limitations of your life also becomes effortless.