

Homily
5th Sunday of Lent
April 3, 2022

I'm a Mel Brooks fan. I'm especially fond of Space Balls and Young Frankenstein. But one of my favorite scenes from all his movies is from History of the World, Part 1. It's when Moses is coming down from the mountain juggling three stone tablets. Moses is telling the Israelites about, "God's 15" – then one of the tablets crashes to the ground (Oy!) and he holds up the two remaining tablets – "10 Commandments."

Maybe Mel Brooks wasn't being so reverent, but we take the Ten Commandments very seriously:

- I. I am the Lord your God: you shall not have strange gods before me.
- II. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.
- III. Remember to keep holy the Lord's Day.
- IV. Honor your father and your mother.
- V. You shall not kill.
- VI. You shall not commit adultery.
- VII. You shall not steal.
- VIII. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
- IX. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.
- X. You shall not covet your neighbor's goods.

Exodus and Deuteronomy go to great lengths to establish the relationship between God and man, and between man and man; in God's covenant with us and our failing to comply and how we interact with and fail each other.

The first three commandments are all about how we relate to God, 'We have only one God, we don't disparage His name and we keep His day holy.' The remaining seven are about how we relate to each other, 'We treat those around us kindly.' Above all, each Commandment speaks to us as individuals. I am to respect God. I am to respect my neighbor. Jesus summarizes this best in the Gospels: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. And "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

I often quote Zig Ziglar. He is best known for his motivational speeches, but he is also known for his gentle humor. I know I'm speaking to the choir, so this wouldn't apply to any of us: Zig said he invited a friend to church. The man answered, "Well, I'd like to go. But the church is full of hypocrites." To which Zig replied, "That's okay. There's always room for one more."

The reality is we are all hypocrites. And I am the worst. I stand here as an ordained deacon going on 6 years, a married man, going on 31 years, and a father of two grown men, of whom I am very proud despite myself. Yet, I am a sinner. And I seem to confess the same sins month after month, year after year.

So, does that mean I'm done for, I should just give up and call it a day? No! I am called to perfection, yet I am a failed human, born into original sin. But I have the Sacrament of Baptism giving me new life. I have the Sacrament of Reconciliation healing me of the rift between God and me caused by my sinfulness. I have the Sacrament of the Eucharist feeding me, nourishing me and strengthening me for my journey, a journey filled with potholes that I often fall into.

So how is it that I, as sinful as I am, can stand here before you and proclaim God's Word? God didn't call me because I'm worthy; He made me worthy in His call. God loves me beyond all measure. I cannot measure how much God loves me. None of us here can measure how much God loves us because He loves us with a perfect and infinite love, no matter how much we fail Him. He makes us all worthy in our calling.

In today's Gospel, the scribes and the Pharisees bring a woman accused of adultery to Jesus. My first question is, "Where is the man?" Doesn't it take two to commit adultery? We know the scribes and the Pharisees were testing Jesus. And they were just using this woman to get Jesus.

Then Jesus bends down to write on the ground with His finger. My second question is, "What was Jesus writing on the ground?" Scripture doesn't tell us. Tradition doesn't tell us. All we know is that Jesus then stood and instructed them to stone her if they are first without sin. Then He bends down and continues writing with His finger.

Scholars have tried to guess what Jesus wrote on the ground. Was it "Thou shalt not commit adultery" or "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow" or "Judge not lest you be judged?" What do you think he wrote? The fact is, we don't know. We will have to wait until Jesus tells us Himself when we enter into our glory.

Today, I want to believe that He was drawing Roman numerals. One, two, three, four, five, a number for each of the Ten Commandments. I want to believe that when He stood and told them "Let the one among you who is without sin cast the first stone," He then bent down and continued, six. Do you remember the Sixth Commandment? The scribes and the Pharisees knew, "You shall not commit adultery." Then He continued seven, eight, nine, ten. Jesus does have a flair for the dramatic.

He loves us so much that He didn't scold the scribes or the Pharisees. He didn't preach to them about their hypocrisy. He didn't condemn them. He simply told them to first look at themselves. How often do we look at ourselves when we see sin in action? Or rather, how often do we scold or preach or condemn when someone wrongs us or someone we love or even someone we don't know? It's hard to look at ourselves, to really look at the sinfulness inside, to acknowledge that which can cause so much shame.

One by one, they left, beginning with the elders. My third question is, "Why the elders?" Were they the most guilty? Did they recognize their own hypocrisy among their junior peers? Jesus then told the woman, "...where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She replied, "No one, sir." Then Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you." And then He gave her this directive, "Go, and sin no more."

Jesus doesn't condemn her, He loves her. Isn't that what happens when we go to confession? We are absolved from our sins; we are reconciled to God. No matter how bad we've messed up, we go, we confess, we express our sorrow, and we are forgiven.

The only way we cannot be forgiven is if we do not confess, if we do not recognize our sin and if we do not express our sorrow for committing that sin. That is why the Sacrament of Reconciliation is so very powerful and so very important. Statistically speaking, we are the choir; we all go to confession.

But, do we need to go more often? Do we need to look deeper into ourselves? Do we need to recognize our own hypocrisy? I know I do, but it is hard to be honest with myself. I don't want to be that hypocrite; I want to be honest. I don't want to stand in judgement of others; there is only one Judge. I don't want to be guilty of the very sins I'm judging others for.

I'm going to confession. Why don't you join me? There's always room for one more.