

prayer fasting LENT almsgiving

reflections on

2018
3rd Sunday

Vocation in the context of Lent

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The first reading from the Book of Exodus is weighty stuff. It reminds us of the Ten Commandments written on stones, given to Moses and delivered to the Jewish people. But if one scrutinizes the ten commandments one begins to realize they have been with us from birth.

They are written on our hearts along with other commonsense concepts that are essential to getting along with and respecting our fellow human beings.

God created us with extraordinary freedom, and like the directions for operating a computer, they are directions for using our freedom in the way the manufacturer intended, just like achieving positive results from a computer comes from following the directions. In common jargon or in legalese, we call such human directions the “natural law,” which all of us commonsense folks are able to understand and hopefully follow. However, just as we make errors in using our computers, we likewise make foolish errors in the decisions about some of the things we do. This is the other aspect of the freedom bestowed upon us. We’ve all done dumb things because there is also within each of us, besides commonsense, another tendency called self-satisfaction, gratifying self-indulgence, or the passionate desire for power, praise, or plenty, too often at the expense of others.

Brothers and sisters: Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, Jews and Greeks alike, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

In the second reading, Saint Paul bemoans the habits we have acquired by using our freedom without much thought or enlightenment. Thus, when the natural or divine law is ignored and ingrained in the habits of folks like the Greeks of his time, they will say “natural law” or insight is not “rational” or can’t be “proved”, or with the Jews, not accepting Christ as the way, truth and life, becomes an immovable obstacle (stumbling block) to their long-time way of acting, thinking and living, and thus they would not even listen to or consider a new insight. We do that very thing from time to time!

The last reading is from the Gospel where Jesus takes physical action against the cheats and sellers in the Temple. He cleaned the swamp, so to speak. Yet the folks who had become accustomed to dealing with the convenience of having sellers and money changers at hand, voiced their objections by asking what “right” Jesus had? They had become habituated to those who had encroached upon sacred space. It was a common inappropriate practice that was allowed to fester. Someone in authority failed to do his job and little by little both the sellers’ presence and unjust corruption was tolerated. Jesus was an heroic figure amidst comfortable or indifferent authority, dishonest dealers and annoyed customers.

A major and crucial task for us as ordinary folks is to develop our intelligence and our faith, or “fides et ratio” as it is said in Latin.

Though Jesus took physical action in the case of “business in the Temple” to make a point, he generally delivered his words of both truth and love by speaking and conversing, often fortifying his listeners’ faith by healing someone. Since we live in a complex twenty-first-century world, misconceptions of the natural and divine laws have also become more complex and difficult to disentangle. The “legal” elimination of babies in the womb, the confusion in human values and relations regarding male and female, the significance of marriage, whether there is such a thing as truth and developing a mature understanding of human sexuality are preponderant examples. Thus, carefully reasoned study combined with a thoughtful authentic faith, followed by congenial dialogue is imperative for arriving at the truth in such matters, resolving confusion and fostering love within our human enterprise.

A person pursuing the discovery of truth, hoping to inspire hearts to love the good, and encouraging a wholesome life may hear a call from Jesus Christ Himself.

DeSales
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