

America is a freedom loving democracy. People would love to say, "don't tell me what to do. I have the right to decide what is best for me". There is always something innate in us that easily resists the law. We block the law; but we need the law. We have something like a love-hate relationship with rules and regulations.

Today's readings teach us with the answer, "why" we should have rules in life, commandments. Ist R, Sirach says: "If you choose, you can keep the commandments, and *they will save you*". It's a matter of our freedom and choice. It says: the Lord has placed before each person, good and evil=life and death" whichever one chooses, that shall be given. For great is the wisdom of the Lord.

Friends, its easier to be a child. A child has very little choice. Most things in child's life is decided for it, like when you have to go to sleep and wake, when to go to play etc. It is somehow imposed on it. St. Paul, IInd, reminds us: among the mature persons, when it comes to freedom and choice: we speak about wisdom; its not the wisdom of the age, but God's wisdom. This wisdom is written in our hearts, through God's law. He who acts according to this wisdom, will choose the good, the way that God commands. That's why-Moses, the law-giver of old, giving the law, asks Israelites to observe it carefully, that they may show their wisdom and discernment to the people.

Whenever we reverence something, we surround it with rules & laws. Anyone of you who loves the baseball/basketball, don't want to see it going out of rules. There are rules that define the game because *it preserves the integrity of the game*, preserves the fun of the game. If the rules are not followed, any player can get easily annoyed. In other words, Its not any more enjoyable.

*God gives us the law. Why? Because he wants to protect the integrity of our moral life and spiritual life. It is something beautiful and good that enhances our life. God's law, planted in your heart, is able to save your souls. It is not experienced as an external imposition, as something outside your freedom. It comes up from the root of your being; is part of your lives, intrinsic to your life. It's a way of ordering your life. It is to make your life more joyful, more perfect and more beautiful. (Like the train can run smoothly on the rails, without the rails, its disaster)*

Looking at the culture in which we live today, we see that you define your life. You follow your wishes, follow your bliss, follow the way you want. Friends, would you accept that logic in any other area of your life, if we take it seriously? Whether it is playing music, or football or golf? For us, it is also important to distinguish between what is really essential in the law and what is peripheral. This is what Jesus is getting at. Jesus often asked this question. What is the heart of the law, which determines, forms, and protects the moral and spiritual life?

We see in today's gospel, Jesus says: "I came, not to abolish the law, but to fulfill the law". He came as the fulfillment and completeness of the law, by giving it new meaning & purpose. For Jesus, an offense like murder or adultery alone is not just offending law. He would rather say: "I say to you, one who hates/insults his brother" is doing some kind of murder. Or offering sacrifice at the altar without reconciling with brother/sister becomes unacceptable to the Lord.

Here is the essence of all God's commandments: "The Lord your God is one; Love your Lord with all your heart and love your neighbour as yourself." If we are able to get this at heart, we are quite close to what Jesus is asking us to be. Because *Love is the heart* of all the law that Jesus taught, lived and fulfilled. "Whoever obeys and teaches others to obey will be called greatest in heaven". Let's try to be among those! Amen.