

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time
February 16, 2020

“It is no accident that murder, theft, lying, and adultery are among the sins prohibited by the Ten Commandments, the essence of the law that God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai. But there is nothing special about these laws, nothing peculiarly ‘Jewish’ or ‘Christian’ about them. They are universal, and even the prophets of Israel recognized that fact.” (Scott Hahn, Reasons to Believe, p.41)

I have heard various individuals claim that there are no universal moral norms. This statement will often arise when discussing different cultures and societies from their own. They further retort that it would be very uneducated and unethical, for us to impose our interpretation of moral norms upon others. I wonder if these same people who claim there are no universal moral norms actually believe what they are saying? Consider the person who engages in theft. Does this same person want others to steal from them? Does a liar expect others lying to them? The obvious answer to both of these questions would be no. Therefore, we can assume, at a minimum, that there is some level of moral evil which are universally found and condemned in all cultures and societies. We can further state these universal norms are “naturally” known by all. Theology and Philosophy would define these as part of the Natural Law, inscribed upon the hearts of all people.

The Church would come to define natural law in a very simple way - Do Good, Avoid Evil. The beauty in this four word definition is that it can be and has been understood by people of various cultures and throughout time. Compare different societies from the past to ours of the present. Do we not all esteem similar virtues and abhor similar vices? The various religions mankind has espoused have all codified these four words in some way. Whether a man prayed to the sun, the moon, or an animal, that man knew, deep down, he should do good and avoid evil. This would lead us to ask a second question. If mankind knows he should do good and avoid evil, then why were we in need of God’s self-revelation in the person of His Son?

To answer this question, I propose this statement - If God did not exist, then we (mankind) would have made Him up. Again, allowing history to be our guide, mankind has always expressed a need to worship. At times we have worshipped a God who was “other.” Which means we could never get to know him, we could only acknowledge his existence. At other times, we have worshipped a god made in our image who catered to our indulgences or desires. It would seem more reasonable if we were going to create a god to worship then we would not create a god who challenged us to do good and avoid evil. Our god would be more sympathetic to our wants. I want a god who approves of my over-indulgence of alcohol, then I create the god Dionysus (Bacchus for our Mardi Gras revelers). In essence, we would worship a god who would grow and change as we grow and change.

Yet, Jesus reveals to mankind the image of a God who is Immutable, meaning He does not change. God is as good and loving now as He ever was or will be. When Jesus said that God loved us, He did not place any conditions upon this love. God loves you and I and this will never change, because God will never change. Some may say: “If God always loves us, then why should we aspire to please Him by doing what He asks?” To that, I respond, “Why not!” If God loves and blesses me at all times, then why not try to return that love by living as He asks us to live? And therefore the choice presented to the people of the Old Testament is still relevant to us today. We have a choice to each day: either we choose to live as God desires us to live or we choose not to. God will never force Himself upon us. He will only gently encourage and assist us. It would appear with all of the strife we see in the world, that maybe a life lived in holiness following God’s divine urgings, might be the thing we need to uplift the lives of those around us.