

God's "Law" – an Encroachment on Freedom or the Source of Freedom?

During Lent, the readings, including those for weekday Mass, tend to focus on things that are generally emphasized during Lent. Some of the readings focus on the "law" that God has given us – Moses, for example, exhorting the Israelites to observe always the law that God had given them and to teach it to their children and grandchildren. In the Gospel, **Jesus said: "do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have not come to abolish but to fulfill."** Jesus goes on to say that anyone who breaks these commandments and teaches others to do so "will be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven;" that doesn't mean they will be Heaven but just less than others, it means that those who are in Heaven will consider them the least of all of God's creatures, precisely because they transgressed the commandments and brazenly taught and encouraged others to do likewise. Is this "law" an encroachment on man's freedom...*or*, could it actually be the source of genuine freedom? To answer that question, we have to take up the question of what Divine Law is, why God gave it to us, its purpose.

To modern ears and disordered passions, the word "law" often sounds restrictive, and of course "unloving" since – according to modern mentalities – love is not a matter of me focusing on the true good of the other but rather everyone else focusing on what I want, love is a focus on me and me getting what I want. Of course, this is the converse of what genuine love really is; such a mentality is truly anti-Christ. But let us return to the question at hand, why does God speak of "law?" Even for someone faithful who has a genuine love of our Lord, "keeping the law" might sound impersonal or something like a business transaction: I do this and you give me that. Of course, that is not the nature of the relation that our Lord wishes to have with us. Yet our Lord said: **if you love Me, you will keep My commands.** So again, how so, why "a law" for man to live by? The Divine law given to us by God is actually revealing who God is, what He is like. Therefore, since man's true fulfillment is to be like God (of the same mind or spirit), the Divine law is telling us how to be like Him and thus become what we are meant to be, and thus reach happiness, fulfillment, maturity, true freedom, and so on. God, for example, is absolute truth so when He commands us not to be dishonest, He is saying: don't be dishonest because that makes you unlike Me, it distorts you and leads to misery. Imagine someone falling down a cliff and badly injuring themselves; they don't die but they're unable to get to help and their bones heal in distorted ways – their arm is crooked, their legs are offset, they have a hunchback. The body is not like it is meant to be and so they can't move like they are meant to move and they're in constant pain; the person is not free to live, and move, and have his being (physically) in the way that he is meant to. Transgressing the Divine Law does the same thing to our soul, to our interior, to our mind and spirit – it makes us unlike we are meant to be and our Lord is telling us that if we persist in such a state, the consequences will be far worse than falling down a cliff and injuring the body.

The Divine Law, then, is a prescription for becoming how we are meant to be, thus leading to happiness and fulfillment – just like the person who fell down the cliff would be if they found a doctor who could put them back perfectly, the way they were meant to be. They are like instructions for the use and maintenance of something we buy – follow them and the thing will serve you faithfully; disregard them and you will break it; if you plug your toaster in, push down the handle, and throw it in a tub of water, it's a problem. The same thing is true when we transgress the Divine Law. The Divine Law leads to true freedom – free of the burden of corruption so we can be like we are meant to be.

Because we do not have infused knowledge like Adam did, and because we are now disordered (mis-shaped) by original sin, we need God to tell us how to be, what it means to love (to be like Him) and what it means to live that out. Suppose a man or woman says that they love their spouse but they frequently ridicule their spouse – like in the case of Elizabeth Leseur; maybe they don't realize or even really intend the hurt they cause but they cause it nonetheless. They have to be told. The same is true for us. God has to teach us what love really means and how to live out: that doing this or that, or failing to do this or that, damages or even breaks our relation with Him. This is the Divine Law; it is for our good.

It is imperative to make clear the nature and purpose of our Lord's commands. They are not arbitrary rules, they are an instruction from the Creator on how to be as we are meant to be. God giving us instructions is an

act of love towards us. If we had the most magnificent automobile ever made and it broke down, would we not be grateful to a good and honest mechanic who came along and said: oh, here's the trouble, don't worry, I can fix it for you? If so, how much more grateful should we be when the good God Himself tells how to be, what to do, what not to do, in order to be straightened out, freed, fulfilled, in order to reach our true destiny?

Taking time to correctly understand what the Divine Law is and its purpose, allowing it to really sink into our minds, is essential. It is especially imperative today since it is now derided and denounced in almost every facet of contemporary society. Rejection and mocking of the Divine Law, of true good, has risen to levels not seen since the time of Christ. Sexual ideology (any use of sexuality outside of marriage) and self-interest that is so extreme that it permits the slaughter of one's children, are indeed prime examples. But we want to be careful to make sure that our understanding of the Divine Law doesn't stop with just these most blatant and egregious examples. Dishonesty, for example, is rampant in our society, and it is not a small matter. All too often the "slicker" (i.e., more dishonest) that someone is today, the more they seem to be admired. Widespread dishonesty has led to an almost complete lack of trust in any authority, and certainly any true authority that calls man back to God. This lack of trust often leads to chaos, violence, and a spiraling increase in looking out for #1 alone, since everyone else is doing the same. Large-scale dishonesty is in politics, media, business, and almost every facet of human life. Is it in our family? A person does not begin to be dishonest by hatching an underhanded scheme for world domination. No, it begins with dishonesty with one's self about one's self – oh come on, who will know if you do this or that, I'm entitled, I'm a good person, I can do what I want; it begins with a lie here or there or some cheating here or there. Greed is another example. How much is enough? All too often, there seems to be no limit. Greed can also be the driver of many other departures from the good instructions from God, including dishonesty.

We need to go further, however. The Divine Law not only says: do *not* do some things because they make you *unlike* Me (God), but it also says: *do* certain things because they make you *like* Me – your one true Father; they make us a member of the great and magnificent Communion of the Saints. And we can't, *cannot*, pick and choose either. We cannot say something like: oh well, I am so nice, I visited the nursing home (a good action) so now I can be in favor of or participate in or advocate for: homosexual acts, transgenderism, cohabitation, fornication, contraception, abortion, dishonesty, greed, pride, or whatever it might be. That would be like saying: well, I got my wife a birthday card so now I can also slap her in the face. Is that a genuine love?

Our Lord's first and greatest commandment is to put God first and foremost; to be all and do all for Him, because He is the One I love and desire to serve first and foremost. Our Lord commands us to teach others to do the same – this is especially true for parents, teachers, coaches, priests – anyone who has responsibility for others, especially young ones. Remember here our Lord's own words: **"whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do so will be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But whoever obeys and teaches these commandments will be called greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven."**

We have all transgressed the Divine Law and thus disfigured ourselves. Is there any hope? Let us finish by recalling some other things we hear in readings for Mass during Lent: Though your sins be as scarlet, repent and I will make you white as wool; repent and I will cast your sins behind my back, they will not even be remembered – not even remembered. These are some of my favorite words in Scripture. You are too kind Lord. But does He really mean it? Could it really be true? In fact, He give us examples, even in Scripture. Let's take one. Suppose you were asked to tell about St Matthew the Apostle and Evangelist. One of the things that you might come up with is that Matthew was a tax collector. Jewish tax collectors were despised by their fellow Jews because they collected taxes for the Romans (their enemy) and because they were usually thieves – they would overcharge and pocket the excess. So Matthew was a tax collector – but how do you know that? Well because it's in the Gospel! Ah, but which Gospel? Only the Gospel of Matthew, only Matthew tells us that *Matthew* was a tax collector. To all the others, he is only Matthew the Apostle, one of their brothers – I will cast your sins behind my back and they will not even be remembered. Then you will sit at table with Me as a true son and brother to all my sons. You are too good Lord, thank you from the bottom of my unworthy heart.

God bless you, Fr Kuhn.