

IN NOMINE JESU

THE TENFOLD SURE COMMAND

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

Our homily for this first Wednesday in Lent is taken from our inspired readings, with our thoughts guided by the following translated pericope:

And one from them asked, testing Him, "O Teacher, what commandment is great in the Law?"

*And He said to him, "'Unconditionally love your God in your whole heart and I in your whole soul' and in your whole mind; this remains the great and first commandment. And (the) second is like it, 'Unconditionally love your neighbor as yourself.' By these the two commandments depend the whole Law and the prophets."*¹

The whole Ten Commandments hang upon the two great commandments – to sacrificially love God and neighbor. That is why these two tablets hang here with the tables separated. The words summarized by our Lord *contain both a wrathful threat and a friendly promise.*² For the Old Adam in each of us, they are a terror and a warning. They show us what we need to do to live in the Real Presence of the Living God. For the New Adam in we Christians, these words *attract and allure us.*³ They display what God has done perfectly in Christ His Son, and remind us that He kept them perfectly for us.

It is fitting that this Lenten season, as our catechumenate prepare to receive their first communion and make their public confession of the faith, that we review the Six Chief parts of the Catechism with them. For them, the review is only of the Small

¹ Matthew 22:35-40

² Tappert, T. G. 2000, c1959. *The book of concord : The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church.* Fortress Press: Philadelphia

Catechism. But, for we who are their parents, teachers, and adult examples, the Large Catechism also may be used. For, we do desire to show them that Christian adults have not graduated from the Catechisms, but remain their students all our lives.

As the Christian grows in the knowledge and use of the treasures of the Faith, he or she learns the meanings behind the meanings instilled in youth. That is, the maturing Christian, in his or her New Nature, desires to dig deeper into the revealed mysteries of God. The Christian does so that he or she may be better equipped to withstand the assaults of the devil, the world, and one's own sinful flesh.

One of the first things that a student of the Catechism, and thus the Word of God, learns about the Tenfold sure command of our Lord, is that nine commandments point back to one. That is, a violation of any commandment two through ten involves a breaking of the first. For those who were here this past Sunday, as the first Adam's falling into the threefold temptation was recounted, it was noted that each fall began with his breaking the First Commandment. That is one reason why our Lord names what we call the meaning of that commandment as the greatest commandment:

*He said to him, "Unconditionally love your God in your whole heart and in your whole soul' and in your whole mind."*⁴

Jesus did just that. He who had been One with the Father and the Holy

³ Ibid.

⁴ Matthew 22:37.

Spirit from before the creation of the World, in eternity before time, willed to restore God's creation before Adam ever sinned. He knew that Adam would sin, that his descendants would be conceived in sin and would commit actual sins themselves. Therefore, to keep the commands for Adam and Eve and their descendants in the Faith, the Word tented in human flesh to redeem us. He who many of you heard is called the Second Adam, took on the Tempter, faced the threefold temptation of the first Adam, and did not fall!

While that was good for Him, and assured Him His rightful place in eternity with the Father and the Holy Spirit, it was not yet good enough for us. For that to happen, the One Who perfectly kept the Greatest and First Commandment had to buy us back from our transgressions of that Holy Law. That meant that blood had to be shed, His Blood, into death. It meant that He had to establish the means of imparting that blood-bought rightness with the Father to people. Therefore, years before His death, He, in His baptism, set aside all waters of the earth as the means, when coupled with His Word, of imparting His perfect fulfillment of the Law to people. Now, in your Baptism, you have assurance that you have kept the Law to perfection, for you have died with Christ, and risen to new life in Him.

Those commandments, dear Christian, you are free to do, and do perfectly in the New Adam who dwells in you by Christ's faith. Everything in those commandments proceeds from that first commandment. It is *the chief source and*

*fountainhead from which all the others proceed; again, to it they all return and upon it they depend, so that end and beginning are all linked and bound together.*⁵ It is cited at least five other times in Scripture. That is certainly why the incarnate Word of God gave its meaning, a quote from another part of Scripture, as the first and greatest.

However, unprompted, the Lord goes on to say that there is another commandment also great. It stands as a header to the Second Table of the Law, placed there by the Lord, even as Jesus said,

*“And (the) second is like it, ‘Unconditionally love your neighbor as yourself.’”*⁶

Jesus did just that, when, before the foundation of the world, in communion with the Father and the Holy Spirit, He resolved to be born of woman, to become the commandment breakers’ friend, to pay the price our sins deserve, into death, accursed death on a wooden cross. In time, the Word became flesh and kept the Second Table of the Law perfectly for His neighbor, unconditionally-sacrificially loving him, you, into death that you might live forever in the Presence of God.

Finally for today, Jesus declares of the Commandments of God:

*By these the two commandments depend the whole Law and the prophets.”*⁷

Those ten Words indicate your state in Christ on account of Holy Baptism.

That they are done in you is proved to you every time you confess the ancient

⁵ Tappert, T. G. 2000, c1959. *The book of concord : The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church*. Fortress Press: Philadelphia

ecumenical creeds. Your confession is further stated in the Large Catechism, where we read:

These words, therefore, ought to be received and esteemed as a serious matter to God because he himself here declares how important the commandments are to him and how strictly he will watch over them, fearfully and terribly punishing all who despise and transgress his commandments; and again, how richly he will reward, bless, and bestow all good things on those who prize them and gladly act and live in accordance with them.⁸

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Wednesday

Exodus 20:1-17; James 2:8-12; Matthew 22:35-40

March 4, 2009

Pastor Michael A. Morehouse

SOLI DEO GLORIA

Translation, second draft:

And one from them asked, testing Him, "O Teacher, what commandment is great in the Law?"

And He said to him, "'Unconditionally love your God in whole the heart of you and in whole the soul of you' and in whole the mind of you; this remains the great and first commandment. And second is like it, 'Unconditionally love the neighbor of you as yourself.' By these the two commandments whole the Law depends and the prophets."⁹

Further Notes:

⁶ Matthew 22:39.

⁷ Matthew 22:40.

⁸ Tappert, T. G. 2000, c1959. *The book of concord : The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church*. Fortress Press: Philadelphia

⁹ Matthew 22:35-40

⁴“Hear, O Israel: ^dThe LORD our God, the LORD is one.³ ⁵You ^eshall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. ⁶And ^fthese words that I command you today shall be on your heart. ⁷gYou shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. ⁸hYou shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ⁹iYou shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.¹⁰

You shall therefore lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and ^fyou shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ¹⁹You shall teach them to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. ²⁰gYou shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, ¹¹

³²³ Thus he demands that all our actions proceed from a heart that fears and regards God alone and, because of this fear, avoids all that is contrary to his will, lest he be moved to wrath; and, conversely, trusts ^(tr-675) him alone and for his sake does all that he asks of us, because he shows himself a kind father and offers us every grace and blessing.¹²

d Cited Mark 12:29; [Isai. 42:8; Zech. 14:9; John 17:3; 1 Cor. 8:4, 6]

the LORD alone
3 Or The LORD our God is one LORD; or The LORD is our God, the LORD is one; or The LORD is our God,

e Cited Matt. 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27; [2 Kin. 23:25]

f ch. 11:18; 32:46; Ps. 37:31; Isai. 51:7; Jer. 31:33

g See ch. 4:9

h ch. 11:18; Prov. 3:3; 6:21; 7:3; See Ex. 13:9

i ch. 11:20; [Isai. 57:8]

¹⁰The Holy Bible : English standard version. 2001 . Standard Bible Society: Wheaton

f See ch. 6:8

g ch. 6:9

¹¹The Holy Bible : English standard version. 2001 . Standard Bible Society: Wheaton

¹² Tappert, T. G. 2000, c1959. The book of concord : The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church. Fortress Press: Philadelphia