

3rd Sunday of Lent – B

15 March 2009

We all know that the rectory has a new resident – that Fr. Thoms is now a “dad.” I think we’ve all met Farley...

Farley is still a puppy – he’s just more than a year old. Coming from the pound, he really had NO manners when Fr. Thoms got him – not to say he really has any now, either! But, like the father of a house, I’ve had to set some rules for Fr. Thoms and Farley:

- ✍ Do not allow Farley to jump up on people – he’s strong – and some people just don’t like dogs!
- ✍ Don’t let him run the house when we’re out – for some reason he LOVES to eat books!
- ✍ Dog heads to NOT belong in the trash can – nor does the contents of the trash can belong all over the floor.
- ✍ Farley is NOT to lick ALL the utensils while the dishwasher door is down. It’s just gross!

There are certainly other rules for Farley, but that’s a sampling. Because Farley is an animal and really doesn’t know any better, we’ve had to set these rules for him (and Fr. Thoms).

Let’s imagine that we set the following rules for eating chocolate.

- ✍ We’re always told that we should eat more fruit.
 - From now on, eat all the fruit you want, as long as it is chocolate coated raisins, cherries and orange slices. After all, it’s still fruit, right?
- ✍ We all need to eat a balance diet, so,
 - From now on, you must eat balanced amounts of white AND dark chocolate. THAT would be a balanced diet.

How does Farley, or your family pet, learn the rules? From the family. YOU set the rules for your house – and those rules are how it will be!

On the other hand, these rules for chocolate are a “twisting” of reason – of what’s reasonable – in order to let me satisfy my desires and wants and feelings and urges.

How about our journey of life? How do WE know how to live? Where do we get our rules? Do we follow a “twisted” set of rules that we’ve developed on our own – to satisfy and indulge every desire and want and feeling and urge?

There are basic “rules” which are right and wrong – no matter what. If we were to visit the deepest parts of the Amazon Rain Forest and discover a tribe of people who have never met someone from the “outside world,” I bet that we would discover that they have a basic moral code – there are just some things – irregardless of culture or even religion – some things that are

just right or wrong. This is called the Natural Law – the Law of God as it is written in the very heart of men and women.

The Natural Law helps us make decisions about a proper course of action – about what is right and wrong – and it does not depend upon any faith. For example, EVERY culture knows that it is simply wrong to take the life of an innocent human being. Even if we grew up on an island in the middle of the South Pacific – like the Island from the TV show “Lost,” we would STILL have a conscience (though not *fully* developed) we’d have a conscience and the Natural Law (written in our hearts by God) helping us to make proper decisions about how we should live – about what is right and wrong.

Well, we DIDN’T grow up on a desert island, did we? We have been privileged to grow up as sons and daughters of God ever since the moment of our baptism. Being one of God’s children is a wonderful grace – but like dad or mom sets rules in the house for the kids – or for the dog – God has set rules for us – not to be mean or hateful or to keep us from having ANY fun – but because he knows that, sometimes, we just get it wrong – we get all “out of whack” and misguided – we act on those animal instincts and start rummaging through the trashcan – like Farley – instead of eating of the wonderful food that God has prepared for us at the dining room table.

Sometimes we can become superficial, hurrying through life – just following our own desires and wants and feelings and urges – regardless of the rules what are meant for our benefit!

Our conscience is what tells us what is right and what is wrong – and there is God’s Natural Law written in our heart instructing us and guiding us. But, sometimes, our conscience is “ill-formed” and actually mistaken! We are SO influenced by the world around us, by what we watch on TV, by the news media (in BOTH political directions), by the mis-information presented to us on important issues. Sometimes, our conscience can become POLLUTED. Then, we’re in trouble!

With a “broken conscience” – we might make up our OWN rules for living – we might re-interpret the rules we were given – in order to indulge our own desires and wants and feelings and urges – like eating chocolate in stead of eating fruit!

Saint Paul tells the Corinthians today that some people did not realize who Jesus really was – the Jews thought that a “crucified” savior was an obstacle – and the Greeks thought it was pure madness! But Saint Paul assures them – and us – that Jesus was (and IS) the Answer to all our human longing for wisdom and happiness.

It is GOD – who made us – who KNOWS what is good for us and what is bad for us. And to help US understand what is good for us, to form our conscience, God gave us the 10 Commandments, as we heard in the 1st reading. Let me talk briefly about just a FEW of these 10 Commandments:

1. “You shall not have other gods besides me.” A child of God worships God alone and does not worship other things (*such as sports, money, possessions, sex, flashy cars, etc.*) **What is # 1 in your life? God, or something else?**
2. **skip**
3. “Keep holy the Sabbath day.” Children of God keep Sunday as God’s Holy Day. They attend Mass and refrain from unnecessary work – and from activities which would force OTHERS to work unnecessarily. We don’t use Sunday to “catch up” on all the work we didn’t finish during the week. **Do we set Sunday aside as a day to praise and thank God – to rest and be with family?**
4. “Honor your father and mother.” Children respect their parents and those in authority over them – the police, teachers – and those in authority show respect to and treat those under their authority kindly. Pope John Paul II stated in his *Letter to Families* that this commandment indirectly asks parents to honor their children – parents should act in such a way that they deserve to be honored by their children – that means being their parent – NOT their best friend! **Do we honor authority, parents, government – or do we just call in to the open line to complain?**
5. “You shall not kill.” A Christian would respect ALL life from God – every person, from the smallest, one-cell, newly conceived embryo to the prisoner on death row, to the elderly person in the nursing home. EVERY life – WITHOUT exception – must not be harmed or destroyed or killed.
 - This is the issue with Embryonic Stem Cell Research. In light of all the news about it this week, let me clarify some things about it.
 - The Church is NOT against stem cell research.
 - The Church IS against embryonic stem cell research.
 - There is MUCH promising research being done on adult and umbilical cord stem cells – there has YET to be ANY promising results from embryonic stem cell research.
 - But for some reason, certain people with influence over political decisions have decided that we should spend tax dollars – your money and mine – to destroy the tiniest and most vulnerable of human lives – the embryo.
 - Some people say that their choice of candidate in an election doesn’t really matter when it comes to issues of respect for human life and abortion – I certainly hope that the past 50-days has proven how important our vote is in protecting and defending morality and human life...

Do we do everything in our power to respect the lives of others – from the youngest in the womb (or test tube or freezer) to the oldest and most sickly? Or are we indifferent?

6. skip

7. skip

8. “You shall not bear false witness.” Thou shalt not lie. Children of God don’t tell lies – the Father of Lies is Satan – our Father is the Father of Truth and Good. “I am the way and the TRUTH and the life.” We live the truth, no matter how hard, because God is Truth. **Is the truth something we avoid in order to escape what is our due or to try and avoid “getting in trouble?”** Ask Bernie Madoff – eventually it’ll catch up to you!

9. skip

10. skip

God is SO good to us! He knows that, like Farley, we sometimes go rummaging through the trash can of things around us – He knows that we sometimes act out of our desires and wants and feelings and urges.

So, he offers us His help – the 10 Commandments, the guidance of the Church – who is able to examine and review moral issues with an “level head” and without emotion or influence – just the guidance of 2000 years of Tradition and reflection and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

God writes the basic law in our hearts – but He develops it more in the 10 Commandments to help us form our conscience – and live, above all, the 2 greatest commandments – Love God with all your heart and strength; love your neighbor as yourself.

If we could live these two – we’d actually be living all 10 Commandments. Is God REALLY the MOST important thing in my life? Do YOU want to be lied to? Do YOU want to be dishonored or disrespected? Do YOU want to be killed before your time in order to use your DNA for experiments?

Lent is the time for each of us to examine our conscience – to see if it is well formed or not (and if it’s not – to inform it) – and to strive once again to love God with all our strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Sometimes the “Rules” just help me keep my head out of the garbage can – and keep me coming to the Supper Table of the Lamb. If you find your head in the trash – Reconciliation helps us clean off the garbage, get back on track – and truly love God and others with all our strength.

As we allow the Lord’s teaching to form our conscience, hopefully the response to today’s Psalm is OUR response, “You, Lord have the words of eternal life.” (John 6:68)

Lenten Appeal weekend 2 follows...

