

First Reading: Ex 20, 1-17

Second Reading: 1 Cor 1,22-25

Gospel: Jn 2,13-25

Commandments of Love_ an influence in Politics

“You shall not do this! You shall not do that!” On, those terrible and terrifying Ten Commandments!

How many of us can remember when we learned the Ten Commandments in our catechism classes? Well, I can recall that I had to memorise the whole list, so that I could recite them any time our catechism teacher called on me or the parish priest stopped to ask me before I could receive my First Holy Communion. And it seemed to be that the commandments I most remembered always began with, “You shall not...!”

Today this Third Sunday of Lent, you and I hear again that list of the Ten Commandments in the First Reading from the Book of Exodus. But we know that the commandments are not simply negatives – “you shall not” – but are really something very positive. For they show us the way of love, how to live a life of love, how to promote the consequences of love around us. Remember that Jesus reduced the Ten Commandments to a short phrase: “Love God completely and love your neighbour as yourself!”

It seems to me that the Ten Commandments are really *social* guides, the directions that God wants us to follow if we are going to live happily in community. Thus these Ten Commandments can help us to be the “Church in service of reconciliation, justice and peace” that the Second African Synod will be working for when it meets in Rome this coming October.

When each of us was growing up, we were probably told by our mother or father, by our aunties or grandparents, what we should do to if we wanted to be really good people, people that others would trust, would want to have around them, would include among their close friends. These instructions are particularly important in the African family. Here we learn the meaning of that wonderful African proverb about ubuntu: “*A person is a person through other persons!*”

Here in Zambia today, and indeed all over the countries of Africa, we need to build the communities where you and I can come to be all that God wants us to be. What will that mean practically, politically? It will mean that we honour God’s name by being truthful in all our dealings with others. It will mean that we worship God by participating fully in the life of our Church. It will mean that we strengthen our family lives by respecting our parents, our children, all our relatives.

Moreover, it will mean that in our social relationships we show forth the reconciliation, justice and peace that the Second African Synod will be talking about. Respect for life from the moment of conception to the moment of death, honesty in all business dealings, faithfulness and chastity before and during marriages. These are just a few of the obvious consequences of trying to follow the commandments as social guides.

Thus we can begin to see how the Ten Commandments spoken of in the First Reading, the Ten Commandments that we learned to recite – and live by – in our catechism lessons, are really relevant to the Church of the Second African Synod. The Synod’s preparatory document sums this up in a beautiful expression: “The Church’s role in a divided Africa is to draw people together as brothers and sisters, including the non-baptised, under Christ, the Tree of Life and the Word of Reconciliation” (Lineamenta #73).

But we will never be sisters and brothers unless we strive to live by the positive dimensions of the social guides provided in our Ten Commandments.

When we gather in our Small Christian Communities here in Zambia, it would be a very good exercise in preparation for the Second African Synod if we did some review of our lives in the light of the Ten Commandments. No, I don't mean a public confession of my sins or, even more, a public accusation of the sins of others! I mean a review of how the commandments shape our relationships, build our institutions, influence our politics.

For example, we could ask questions like this, following from an understanding of the commandments as social guides for our lives:

How can your Church help in making school and healthcare systems more efficient? What can your Church do to improve the situation of human rights and promote democracy? To prepare Christians for civil and political life? (*Lineamenta Questionnaire #21-23*)

When God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses, as we heard in today's First Reading, it was to help the Chosen People, the Nation of Israel, live the fullest of human lives, both personally and socially. When we recall these Ten Commandments now during this Lenten season, it is for the same reason. And this can have great consequences for all of us here today in Zambia!

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND SHARING IN SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

- Do we see the Ten Commandments as prohibitions (don't do!) or as invitations (do do!)? Why?
- Do the Ten Commandments have anything to say about the political life of Zambia today?
- How would the theme of the Second African Synod make any difference in the debates going on now about a new Constitution for Zambia.

SKETCH

Have two people who look like politicians argue with each other, waving papers and books in each others' face. Have another two people talking peacefully with each other and then working together to improve some local situation – e.g, repairing a road, building a fence.

COMMUNITY PRAYERS

- We pray, Lord, that we may see the Ten Commandments as ways of loving you and loving our neighbours. *Lord, hear our prayer! Lord graciously hear us!*
- We pray, Lord, for your help in promoting a spirit of cooperation in Zambia so that we can truly develop as a nation. *Lord, hear our prayer! Lord graciously hear us!*
- We pray, Lord, that the Second African Synod brings new life to our Church in Zambia and all around Africa. *Lord, hear our prayer! Lord graciously hear us!*