

- In our readings over the next several weeks are two primary themes: trust in God’s love...and obedience to His Word and His commandments...which are an extension of His love for us, just as the rules of any parent are for the good of his children.
- The Church gives us three readings today (of many such that are available) to emphasize the necessity of obeying God’s commands.
- In fact, the whole history of the Jews reflects the spiritual need and reality to follow the loving direction of God—He who loves us so much that He sacrificed Himself upon the cross to prove that love for us.
- But we must reflect that love back to Him, to those around us, and even to ourselves. All God’s direction is directed toward on furthering His love to the world, and therefore in spreading the good to all.
- And St. John states it very clearly: “...*this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.*” (1John 5:3 RSV)
- It’s common to hear the retort: “Loving God and neighbor is more than following a bunch of rules!”
- ...and that is true. One cannot legislate charity, for instance; that must come from the heart.
- But following the commandments and direction of God IS charity and goodness. God does not waste His or our time with unnecessary strictures...and certainly does not deny us any thing that is truly good.
- Even the sorrows and pains and difficulties that He allows to happen to us have an ultimately greater spiritual good if we receive them in trust in His never-failing love.

- We may not see how, but we tend to be ever so short sighted and obsessed with the immediate, while God is concerned with eternity and our spiritual welfare.
- Just look at sufferings of the saints...and even look at the crucifixion—normally evil in itself, but when accepted with trust in God’s ultimate goodness, He transforms it to eternal good.
- And when we receive suffering of any kind with trust in His goodness, it only redounds to our eternal welfare.
- Many saints declared that their sufferings were trivial compared to the good that God has in store for His faithful in Heaven—like St. Paul wrote: *“I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”* (Romans 8:18)
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- Now the emphasis for us remains upon the moral law of God, because in morality lies charity.
- Nowhere does Jesus lessen the import of the moral law; in fact, he only strengthens it...as when He says in the Sermon on the Mount: *“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”* (Matthew 5:27-28)
- By the way, what does that say about pornography? Because adultery is mortal sin, so also is viewing pornography or reading pornographic novels and the like...because in those things is sinful desire.
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- Now the New Testament writers follow faithfully Jesus’ lead...St. Paul writing: *“...fornication and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is fitting among saints. Let*

*there be no filthiness, nor silly talk, nor levity, which are not fitting...*” (Ephesians 5:3-4)

- ...and in 1 Peter: “*As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct...*” (1 Peter 1:14-15 RSV)
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- Now Paul mentions fornication—relations between an unmarried man and woman—which was the least sinful of the major sexual sins in the Jewish Law...though the New Testament writers affirm that even it is unquestionably a mortal sin.
- And if fornication is so, how much more so are adultery and homosexual acts, which are much more strongly condemned?
- This is simply God’s Word, and thus we cannot ignore it...but rather trust in His love for us.
- And yet...those who have such desires have such an opportunity to prove their fidelity by abstaining from such activity regardless of their desire...and in that way they can certainly be greatly blessed for that fidelity.
- After all, we all have desires which we must refrain from indulging.
- But if we do fall due to temptation to any sin, rush to confession, receive God’s forgiveness and grace, and be determined not to fall again...seeking the holiness to which we are called.
- Even St. Thomas Aquinas acknowledged that sexual temptations are strongest of all...but God gives us the grace to conquer, never allowing us to be tempted beyond our strength.
- But we must have that determination and courage to do so.
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- Yes, living the Gospel is more than following rules, but following the direction and rules of God is nevertheless essential for fidelity to Him. That obedience is a *sine qua non*—Latin for “that without which it cannot be”—for true discipleship to Christ.

- Indeed, Jesus Himself emphasizes that we must follow the commandments of God to come to everlasting life. Remember when He tells the rich young man: *“If you would enter life, keep the commandments.”* (Mt 19:17)...and He says: *“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”* (John 14:15)...and He established the Church to guide us how to do just that, telling the apostles—the beginning of the Church—at the end of the Gospel of Matthew: *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations... teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you...”* (Mat 28:19-20 RSV)
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- It’s like understanding a language—knowing the vocabulary does little good if one does not follow the rules of grammar. Without the grammar, the vocabulary becomes unintelligible.
- Well...charity is God’s vocabulary; His commandments part of the grammar...and it is through the observance of both, and by His grace, that we compose our own masterpiece novels of our lives... which can win the ultimate prize of Heaven.

Reading I

[Dt 4:1-2, 6-8](#)

Moses said to the people:

“Now, Israel, hear the statutes and decrees  
which I am teaching you to observe,  
that you may live, and may enter in and take possession of the land  
which the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you.  
In your observance of the commandments of the LORD, your God,  
which I enjoin upon you,  
**you shall not add to what I command you nor subtract from it.**  
Observe them carefully,  
for thus will you give evidence  
of your wisdom and intelligence to the nations,  
who will hear of all these statutes and say,  
‘This great nation is truly a wise and intelligent people.’  
For what great nation is there  
that has gods so close to it as the LORD, our God, is to us  
whenever we call upon him?  
Or what great nation has statutes and decrees  
that are as just as this whole law  
which I am setting before you today?”

Responsorial Psalm

[Ps 15:2-3, 3-4, 4-5](#)

**R. (1a) One who does justice will live in the presence of the Lord.**

Whoever walks blamelessly and does justice;  
who thinks the truth in his heart  
and slanders not with his tongue.

**R. One who does justice will live in the presence of the Lord.**

Who harms not his fellow man,  
nor takes up a reproach against his neighbor;  
by whom the reprobate is despised,  
while he honors those who fear the LORD.

**R. One who does justice will live in the presence of the Lord.**

Who lends not his money at usury  
and accepts no bribe against the innocent.

Whoever does these things  
shall never be disturbed.

**R. One who does justice will live in the presence of the Lord.**

Reading II

[Jas 1:17-18, 21b-22, 27](#)

Dearest brothers and sisters:

All good giving and every perfect gift is from above,  
coming down from the Father of lights,  
with whom there is no alteration or shadow caused by change.  
He willed to give us birth by the word of truth  
that we may be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

Humbly welcome the word that has been planted in you  
and is able to save your souls. Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deluding yourselves.

Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this:  
to care for orphans and widows in their affliction  
and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

Gospel

[Mk 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23](#)

When the Pharisees with some scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus, they observed that some of his disciples ate their meals with unclean, that is, unwashed, hands. —For the Pharisees and, in fact, all Jews, do not eat without carefully washing their hands, keeping the tradition of the elders. And on coming from the marketplace they do not eat without purifying themselves. And there are many other things that they have traditionally observed, the purification of cups and jugs and kettles and beds. — So the Pharisees and scribes questioned him, “Why do your disciples not follow the tradition of the elders but instead eat a meal with unclean hands?” He responded, “Well did Isaiah prophesy about you hypocrites, as it is written: *This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines human precepts.* You disregard God’s commandment but cling to **human tradition.**”

He summoned the crowd again and said to them, “Hear me, all of you, and understand. Nothing that enters one from outside can defile that person; but the things that come out from within are what defile.

“From within people, from their hearts, come evil thoughts, unchastity, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, folly. All these evils come from within and they defile.”