

“Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”

GOD’ LOVE IN GOD’S LAW

Let’s try to delve a little into the subject of morality. There is a story about a schoolboy who was asked what he thought God was like. He replied, that as far as he could make out, God was, “the sort of person who is always snooping around to see if anyone is enjoying himself and then trying to stop it”. Well as C. S. Lewis says, i’m afraid that is the sort of idea the word morality raises in a good many peoples mind. They say that morality with it rules and prohibitions is something that interferes with how we live our life, something that restricts our freedom, something that stops you from having a good time. But in truth morality with its rules is concerned with fairness and harmony between individuals and harmony with the presence of God within us. The rules of morality are given to us by God, and articulated by the Church, so that we can live in the freedom of being conformed to Truth. Living conformed to Truth is a tremendous positive so that the negatives just naturally fade into the background. The main premise here is that objective Truth exists whether we like it or not. We don’t create truth, we find truth. And we have no power to change it to our tastes. Truth may not make us comfortable but it does make us free.

Moral restrictions make us free? Really? We have been conditioned by our culture, our society, and our friends to assume the opposite. It’s also common to assume that the Church’s moral guidelines are essentially about imposing rules, rules that breed a kind of pharisaism when viewed from the outside (and even from the inside as Jesus points out: ‘Observe and do what they teach not what they do’) These assumptions put the Church in a negative light and are the greatest obstacle for the Church trying to evangelize people into the Church. So like that schoolboy we have a very negative view of God’s presence in our lives since the Church is the sacrament of God in the world. This negativity is also personal for me because most of my family says the don’t want to be Catholic because there are too many rules. They say, ‘ I prefer to be plain Christian’. But you know what the result of it is. They presently don’t go to any church. Except Michael he loves to go to church because of his near death experience and so he does feel free.

So what would those who are so negative prefer? A god who is a Grandfather god rather than God the Father? Let us see where that leads. We all accept that God is love. But by that we mean one pleasant aspect of love. We focus on kindness. God is Kind! In reality God is so much more in important ways, but let's go on. So we maintain that God if He is good must be kind. Now kindness is the desire to see others rather than oneself happy. Not happy in this specific way or that, but just happy. What do they say about Disneyland? The happiest place in the world. Thus we would prefer God to say about anything we happen to like doing right or wrong - "what does it matter in the grand scheme of things as long as they are contented?" This is the grandfather god, a senile benevolence who likes to see young people enjoy themselves and whose plan for the universe is simply that it might be truly said, at the end of each day, 'a good time was had by all.' Such a god and universe, though, cannot be sustained. How often do grandparents say when the kids become obnoxious - 'all right, enough is enough, send them back to their parents?

We send them back to their loving parents, their loving God, because these are they who love their children unconditionally. They are the main teachers of right and wrong behavior. They know that love is more than kindness. Yes there is kindness in love but love's perfection is more than kindness - it is its fulfillment. When kindness is separated from the other aspects of love, there arises a certain fundamental indifference to its object. Kindness merely as such cares not whether its object becomes good or bad, provided only that it escapes suffering. In the fullness of love, on the other hand, we would rather see our loved ones suffer much rather than be happy in a degraded state or engaging in hurtful modes of action.

Love involves setting boundaries and imposing discipline. God is love and he gives us the means to be perfect in our love for the beloved to the point where we will discipline them whenever they stray. That's what the boundaries are for. They may be tested but they are still there. I was sharing with a teenage girl a while back who was in a terrible state. She almost completely lost her self confidence and self respect and was making degrading choices in her life. As a result her life was becoming unbearable, As she thought about the families she knew about and thought about her own, out of the blue she told me I wish I had boundaries and I wish my parents would discipline me. Then I would know that they cared about me.

Paradoxically boundaries and discipline done consistently out of love makes us free no matter if we are a child, an adolescent or and adult. Speaking of freedom, it is the wisdom of the Church that freedom of choice is not given to us by God so that we could redefine, on our own, what is good and what is evil, but so that we could respond in liberty to God's offer of friendship and parenthood. This freedom of choice is what we call our free will. It allows us to make any choice we want, but is only beneficial if it corresponds to Truth.

Yes God wants our actions and thoughts to conform to the truth. Often we are perplexed on how to do this. So we ask questions of Jesus, of the Church, our friends and companions. Sometimes though we take the answer we get and hear only a one dimensional representation of moral law. We follow the law out of obligation rather than in freedom. But a morality of obligation can only move us negatively by the teaching that disobedience carries the threat of divine punishment. This kind of morality may work for awhile and be beneficial but leads either to rebellion when our assumptions about God and justice are not realized or we become prideful in our community and present ourselves as better than anyone else. We become hypocrites and we know what Jesus thought about them. This leads to a kind of death to our spirit. But Jesus points us to another way. If we take Christian morality not as a clutch of dead legalisms but as a path to happiness and freedom and love, we become fully alive. Yes the moral law points us to something profound: how to live in order to grow in virtue (inner strength) and attain the fullness of life. This will lead us in a walk with the Lord that is one of freedom not one of fear. Yet this walk in God's presence is not easy. It will not be all kindness and light and we will experience suffering, even great suffering. But we know that God has been there too and He has paid us the amazing compliment of loving us in the deepest, most tragic most inexorable sense. He is sharing with us the way of the cross, the way to new life.