

Sermon Deuteronomy 4 1 9 4th Sunday af Pent Series B

Sermon: 14th Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Deuteronomy 4:1-2,6-9 (vv.1-2)

Theme: Trust and obey

Goal: To show that the Commandments are not burdens but they protect us from the evil as God's good will for His redeemed people

Dear Friends,

Introduction: God is asking us to hear His decrees and laws and to follow them "so that you may live". How does this match with the core doctrine of Justification by Faith in Christ alone? Do we live by faith or do we live by obedience to the Law? – Both issues are linked in such a way that we cannot separate them. To understand it better, let us go back to the time when God gave His Commandments.

I - Freedom from Slavery

The people of Israel had been slaves in Egypt for almost 400 years. God delivered them through the mighty hands of Moses. They received the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai and God made a Covenant with them there: He would be their only God and they would be His "treasured possession, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex 19:5-6). 40 years had passed and the people, after wandering through the desert, were about to enter the Promised Land, accomplishing the promise given to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Now, in his last book, Moses reminds the people that they are God's people and that they have to walk in God's way. They were not delivered from slavery to walk their own sinful way and their own paths, but they were delivered to walk the holy way of the Lord, following His decrees and laws, being a blessing among the other nations and a light to the Gentiles. *It is as if Moses is saying, "in the light of what God has done for you, you should obey Him"* (ABC, p. 218).

Freedom from slavery: This is what Jesus did for us when He died on the cross and paid for our sins. St. Peter wrote: “For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect” (1 Peter 1:18-19). “Therefore, you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9); (almost the same words addressed to the people of the Old Covenant). As God’s people of the New Covenant, we are called to “hear the decrees and laws” of our God and “to follow them, so that we may live”. We belong to God and we trust Him over all by faith in Christ, walking on His ways and following our Saviour as sheep of the Good Shepherd.

II – The Commandments: Not a burden, but to protect us
The Commandments were given by God not as burden, but to protect us. They are like a fence around us. Don’t trespass the limits. It’s dangerous. Imagine what happens when you break some of the commandments. For example: If you commit adultery. Two families will be destroyed: your family and the family of your other partner. And you will carry a huge burden in your conscience and in your life. The way God proposes to us is: Live well your family life, with your wife/husband, with your children. Enjoy your family life! If people wouldn’t be promiscuous, we wouldn’t have all the sexually transmitted diseases. One man to one wife: This is the good will of God. Whatever goes beyond this causes problems. – Another example: If you murder someone. Let us have a look for what happened to Oscar Pistorius: He not only killed his girlfriend, but he lost his career, his freedom, the respect and honour he had conquered as a runner. – And so you can go on through all the other

commandments. It is always advantageous to follow them and not to trespass them. They were given for our good. As God's children by faith in Jesus, we hold firm to His hand and walk with Him the dangerous dark paths of this present life. He will guide us along the right path.

But we, as stupid children, we like to walk on our own. Does a child like to walk holding his father's or mother's hand? Usually they try to run away to walk by themselves. What happens if a child breaks away from its mother's hand to cross the road? It has a big chance to be hit by a car. And this happens when we try to walk by ourselves free from God's gracious hands. God is always calling us back. He wants to protect us. He forgives us when we fall into temptation and He gives us a new chance: Hear my decrees and follow my laws. I love you and I don't want to hurt you. I gave even my only Son for you to have you as a forgiven child in my family. Don't run away. Here is the way of life. Don't walk the way of death.

III – Teach them to your children

There is a detail in this text that I like very much. God is not only concerned about the welfare of the adults, but He looks to the future: “Teach (my decrees and laws) to your children and to their children after them.” Education and religious education did not used to be the responsibility of the school or of the church. It used to be the responsibility of the family. Nowadays the parents are so busy that they delegate the education of their children to others: to a nanny, to a preschool, to the Sunday School... and seldom some Bible Story is told at home. I know that many of you pray with the children at home. God has a big concern about our children and grandchildren. He wants them to grow up walking in His way – not only that they become a good doctor, a professor, and that they have a successful career. God wants the children close to Him, and

this is the parents' responsibility. When you bring them to the Holy Baptism, to the church even as babies, to the Sunday School; when you tell them the stories about Jesus before they go to bed (and not just tales and entertainment), and pray with them, God will bless you. I know also that not all of them will remain in the church; some will run away. But God is waiting like the father waited for the prodigal son. And our prayers are with them.

Martin Luther wrote about how to bring up a child in God's way:
"This is the right way to give education to a child, with kindness and love. If you use only the rod to force them to study, maybe they will learn, but not with good will. But if you teach them with love and kindness, things will go deep in their heart and they will trust God. And when we talk to them we shall talk their language and as they talk to one another, so that they can understand it better. This will give them a good guidance for their entire life" (Free translation from OS 7,345).

Conclusion: The stress between faith and obedience must be well understood. Faith in Christ saves alone; but faith is never alone. Faith is always followed by good deeds and obedience. – Obedience can be done without faith, as it happens in many religions, especially in non-Christian religions. But it doesn't save, because no one can live a perfect life of obedience to please God. Obedience in these religions is done out of fear from punishment, not out of love to God. We need God's forgiveness and love in Christ to begin a new life, a life of faith and voluntary obedience. – Transfer this relationship to God to your relationship to your wife/husband: You don't please your partner out of obedience, out of duty, out of obligation; we please each other out of love and we do what he/she likes out of love. This is the perfect relationship, not always easy to accomplish. But this is the ground – in our relationship to God as well. Trust and obey.

Amen.