

Homily for the 5th Sunday of Lent

One of the most important ways we can summarize the whole Bible is with the word “covenant”. Starting with Abraham and stretching all through Israel’s history, and reaching a culmination in Jesus Christ, God has continually made covenants with His people. What is a covenant? Well, it’s kind of like a contract and kind of not all at the same time. A contract is an agreement which involves the exchange of goods and services. We have a contract with our credit card company – we get the goods and services, but we got to pay our monthly statement.

But, God is not just about goods and services. Actually, the Father is after the heart and soul of each and every human being. Therefore, He’s in the business of covenants, not contracts. A covenant is a legal means of establishing a real relationship between two previously unrelated parties. So, for example, the sacrament of matrimony is a covenant. It brings about a new reality for a man and a woman, which we call marriage. Covenants involve the exchange of persons – and not just parts of persons – their finances, their families, and the like – but the entire person, their very heart and soul.

And we can see this in today’s first reading from the Prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah contrasts two types of covenants – the old ones, and the one that is to come “in those days”. For example, in the old covenant on Mt. Sinai, God gave Moses the Ten Commandments for the people. You see that had strayed from their relationship with God, and so God had to “show Himself their master”. He had to give them the Law because they no longer knew how to really live as His people. God wanted to convert their hearts – but He had to show them tough love.

But, then Jeremiah also prophesies about a new covenant that God will make with His people “after those days”. Jeremiah says that God will not write His Law on stone tablets; but rather, He will place His law within His people and write it upon their hearts. Then, He will truly be their God, and they will be His people, Jeremiah says. And so, by forming this new covenant with His people, God will no longer have a master – slave relationship with them. Rather, this new covenant is to form a family relationship once again with God as Father.

And when was this new covenant finally established? At the Last Supper. How do we know? Well, listen to the words of consecration, which I will pray later at this Mass: Jesus says, “Take this, all of you, and drink from it, for this is the chalice of my blood, the blood of the new and eternal covenant, which will be poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.” At the Last Supper, Jesus formed a covenant with God’s people, by giving us His entire self – His Body and His Blood, His Soul and His Divinity. And certainly His Body was given and His Blood was shed the very next day on Good Friday, when He was crucified on the cross of Calvary.

Because of what Jesus did – because of the new covenant He has established – we are able to relate to God as His children. In the Son of God, we become sons and daughters of God. No longer are we slaves and God the master. Rather, God is our Father and we are His children. Do you know that? You are not God’s slave. You are a beloved son or daughter of God the Father by virtue of receiving this new covenant, first at baptism, and then at every Mass when the Eucharist is celebrated and Christ’s saving sacrifice for us is made present again.

Sometimes, though, I think we might still think of God as a cruel master. We can have an unhealthy fear that God is going to punish us, or that He's angry with us, or that He only loves us if we don't make mistakes. But, Jesus show us in the new covenant, that is not who God is. Rather, God is revealed as a loving Father, whose love for us never changes. He loves us perfectly as we are. He even forgives our sins when we repent.

You see, the Israelites could never keep the Law perfectly, and so they were slaves under the Law. However, Jesus, as the Son of God, has obeyed God's Law perfectly. And so in Him, we have forgiveness for our sins when we fall short. And that is what the sacrament of reconciliation is all about – actually receiving that forgiveness of God in Christ Jesus. In fact, Jeremiah also prophesied of this reality as well. He said in today's first reading: "For God will forgive their evildoing and remember their sin no more". No more! God truly forgives your sins in reconciliation and they are remembered no more. And so, I invite you to come to our parish penance service on March 27th, or to one of the others in our area, to receive the sacramental forgiveness of God in Confession this Lenten season. Remember, God is your loving Father. God bless you.