3rd Sunday of Lent, March4, 2018

Exodus 20: 1-17

Psalm 19

1Corinthians 1: 22-25

John 2: 13-25

In accepting membership in the People of God, what are the dues we must pay? It is given to us in the Book of Exodus. First and foremost, we must accept Yahweh as our God – solely and completely. All the rest follows. His ways are our ways – from not swearing to honoring your mother and father to not coveting your neighbor’s ass.

Jesus throws out those who would skirt the law – find loopholes. He throws out those who made the temple a place for their own self-interests. He points to himself as Yahweh’s messenger that self-sacrifice and not self-interest is how we are to uphold the covenant agreement.

This is going to be a stumbling block for entrepreneurs, power hungry people, the insolent rich. The cross, Jesus’ cross, as foolish as it seems, is the truth and the way and the life.

Peter Kenny, O.P. has a riff on this theme (“Scripture in Church”, vol. 48, no. 189, p49, Dominican Publications, 2018). He places the moral of our readings in today’s context.

Starting from the theme of law and covenant, one my recall ‘breakthrough revelations a few months ago in the entertainment world and media industries where powerful men – producers, actors, television presenters – were fired and are now being investigated, after accounts of years of bullying and sexual harassment and abuse had come to light. When you think about it, you start asking: Why did they do it? Why did they think that they could get away with it? It seemed that these individual men felt that they were so powerful, or they were so gifted as artists that ordinary laws and rules should not apply to them.

They were above normal conventions, and felt free to set their own rules to get what they wanted out of life. Of course, this attitude is not limited just to men, as in the famous tax evasion case a number of years ago with the ultra-rich property heiress Leona Helmsley, ‘the Queen of Mean’ known for bullying those who worked for her, and who was famously quoted in court as stating: “We don’t pay taxes, only the little people pay taxes’.

For people of genuine faith, whether Jewish or Christian or Muslim, things are different. They are bound by a code, by covenant commitments. For Christians this covenant based in God’s love is demonstrated in Jesus. Thus, also, for a Christian, finding ‘self-fulfillment’ can never be at the cost of other people, but rather is discovered in reaching out to support people in need – because there we find Christ….

This abuse of privilege also applies to the Church, especially the priests. The many cases of abuse by priests especially of children is ugly, illegal, and cries out for justice. The Bishop of Buffalo acknowledges this abuse and has set up a program of reconciliation and compensation for all the victims of clerical wrong-doing. The Church apologizes and wants to try and somehow make up for the damage. Reconciliation means every victim will have access to counseling to attempt to secure healing and closure. Compensation means that victims will receive monies as reparation. This money will come from reserves from insurance, from investment fund reserves, and even from selling diocesan properties. No money will come from Upon This Rock or Catholic Charities. The judgement of the amount will be by State Supreme Court Justice Jerome Gorski and Barbara Howe, a former State Supreme Court justice and Erie County Surrogate’s Court judge. They will have the final say. Lent, especially for Church leaders, is always a time to say ‘I’m sorry”.

Lent is our time to lose self as to be filled up with Christ-crucified – to renew our code of covenant and to live up to our commandments of conduct.