

9.6.2026

23rd Sunday of ordinary time

Fr. Tom Lucas, S.J.

I suspect that most of you have seen Cecil B. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments* at least once in your life. Charleton Heston appears with Big Hair, a dog somewhere between Fabio and *The Bride of Frankenstein*. The 1956 CGI special effects are, by our modern standards, admittedly pretty lame.

While the parting of the Red Sea was a state of the cinematic art effect for the time, as a kid my favorite scene was the giving of the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, with fiery letters etching the stone tablets, a kind of cosmic laser engraving. Tablets tucked under his arm, Moses descending from the lightning streaked heights, after 40 days and nights of fasting.

What he found was not, alas, a waiting crowd kneeling reverently to receive God's own word, but a bacchanale, led by a scantily clad Debra Paget and the evil traitor Dathan, played with scenery-chewing gusto by Edward G. Robinson, who had made his fame by playing gangsters. The scene he found so enraged Moses that he broke the tablets of the law on the Golden calf, which exploded and curtailed the dancing, and, for good measure, an earthquake that swallowed up Dathan. It just doesn't get much better than that.

So, Moses has to go back up the mountain, and the Lord provides a replacement pair of tablets. They appear finally in the movie's last scene forty years later after the people wandered repenting in the desert at the end of the 3-hour 40-minute film which feels like it was forty years long. As Moses disappears on Mount Nebo at the brink of the Promised land, an ominous fiery declaration appears over the tablets of law:

"So, it was written,

So, it shall be done."

The contents of what was written was divided into two chapters: the first tablet described the prescriptions about loving God, rejecting idols, and hallowing the Lord's name and keeping the Lord's Day holy.

It's the second tablet that spoke to our ancestors, and to us about our human interactions: family solidarity—honor your father and mother; turn away from murder and violence; respect the covenant of marriage and avoid abuse of our God-given sexuality, refrain from

theft and lying false witness, don't covet what isn't yours to have, your neighbor's mate or property or good name.

Two complementary messages: Love God, Love your neighbor. Again and again, Jesus, the wisest of teachers simplifies the message: Love.

Paul drums this into his followers:

Owe nothing to anyone, except to love one another;

for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.

The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery;

you shall not kill; you shall not steal; you shall not covet, "

and whatever other commandment there may be,

are summed up in this saying, namely,

"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Love does no evil to the neighbor;

hence, love is the fulfillment of the law."

Love is the fulfillment of the Law.

Matthew's gospel was directed toward the Chosen People, chosen to be God's own. Jesus teaches his followers how we are to behave: with charity towards all, with patience and concern for the neighbor's good, even those who offend the love of God and the duty of neighborly care. Punishment is only the last resort, not the first. God's justice is grounded in the law of love, not vengeance. It seeks to set all free, even the sinner, and bids us to loosen the bonds of sin rather than seek retribution wherever and however we can.

This message is one we need to hear today more than ever, as war and violence are spreading everywhere, as greed and self-promotion are looked on as more acceptable than magnanimity and generosity and empathy, as division and exclusion is the rule rather than the exception.

The seven precepts, the laws of the second tablet are, simply, one law that binds us in solidarity and love. Jesus reminds us that where two or three are gathered together in his name, there he is in the midst of us, showing us, the way of peace and justice based not in retribution or domination but in love that builds and does not destroy. Love that does no evil to the neighbor, simply and finally, is the fulfillment of the Law.

So, it was written, So it shall be done.

With God's help, so it shall be done.