

27. February 2021

“Covenant with God”

Deut 26:16-19

'Yahweh your God commands you today to observe these laws and customs; you must keep and observe them with all your heart and with all your soul. 'Today you have obtained this declaration from Yahweh: that he will be your God, but only if you follow his ways, keep his statutes, his commandments, his customs, and listen to his voice. And today Yahweh has obtained this declaration from you: that you will be his own people - as he has said - but only if you keep all his commandments; then for praise and renown and honour, he will raise you higher than every other nation he has made, and you will be a people consecrated to Yahweh, as he has promised.'

If we speak of God's commandments today, they may seem to many to be impersonal, rigid rules to be obeyed out of pure obligation; to others, however, they are just relics of the past that should be modernised and reinterpreted.

But it is really not difficult to understand, even for non-believers and non-practising people, that these commandments have a deeper meaning. Indeed, in many places they have been the inspiration for today's legislation, as the wisdom they contain has been discovered. It is all the more a tragedy that some commandments today are no longer given the same importance they once had.

If we meditate on today's text, we see that these are not simply laws set in stone. Before they were given to Moses, a close dialogue took place between God and his people.

The commitment to keep the commandments is not in the first instance a heavy yoke imposed on us; it is rather a call to keep them with all our heart. And to keep them with the heart means to love them.

The first commandment says: *“You must love Yahweh your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength.”* (Deut 6:5) Love is a personal relationship with a 'you', and only in that dimension can love truly develop. Nature, for example, may fascinate us and we may be enchanted by its beauty and impressed by its greatness, but we cannot love it in the way we love a person.

The text reveals even more: *“Today you have obtained this declaration from Yahweh: that he will be your God, but only if you follow his ways”*.

So God has presented the people with the commandments to give them life, and the people have accepted them. The commandments are thus a gift given personally by God to the people. The people have said that they want to be God's chosen people, a people who belong to him. What an intimate and worthy relationship can be discovered here! In marriage we can find a reflection of this relationship. On the wedding day we affirm that we want to love each other, and we promise that we will stand by each other on good days as well as on bad days.

This is what happens between God and the people of Israel: they make a covenant. A covenant of love, in which they promise each other mutual love and care.

God's covenant with Israel is thus a covenant of love that includes certain contents. God is faithful to this covenant. He has exalted Israel above all other peoples. But Holy Scripture testifies how many times Israel, for its part, broke the covenant, disobeying the commands of the Lord; but He has called it back to conversion.

It is important for us to recognise the love in God's commandments, which are still relevant for us today. They are not human rules, which are subject to change in the case of acquiring higher knowledge. God's word and his law are holy, and all those who try to keep his commandments and strive to understand their meaning, come into contact with the holiness of God.

Jesus, the Son of God, in whom the law and the prophets have their fullness (*cf. Mt 5:17*), tells us: *“Whoever holds to my commandments and keeps them is the one who loves me”* (*Jn 14:21*), and his commandments are not difficult! For the love of God opens our hearts, so that he can give us his strength to keep this law of his.

Let us understand, then, that we are called to a covenant of love. First there was God's covenant with His chosen people, and this was meant to find its fulfilment and completion in Jesus. In Jesus, God made a new covenant with all humanity (*cf. Lk 22:20*). In him all people are called to enter the Kingdom of God and he is the way that leads to this Kingdom (*cf. Jn 14:6*).

God's love has brought to fullness in Jesus what he had begun in the covenant with Israel. God has fulfilled his promise with the coming of the Messiah, offering his saving love to all mankind in him.