

LENTEN REFLECTIONS

2024 SERIES



Third Sunday of Lent

How Do the Commandments Call to You?

WRITTEN BY SISTER JULIA LANIGAN, GNSH

First Reading: [Exodus 20:1-17](#)

Second Reading: [1 Corinthians 1:22-25](#)

Psalms: [Psalms 19:8, 9, 10, 11](#)

Gospel: [John 2:13-25](#)

These readings highlight our call to live with relational integrity, and in a loving right relationship with our God and with each other. God's love draws us into this and, with great compassion, invites us through all the winding paths of our lives -- to move ever more deeply into the mystery of this love of God and neighbor.

Like most of us, I learned the Ten Commandments as a child. A set of rules I memorized, like many other rules. I later heard that they were meant as food for prayer. This "changed my mind" and it began moving these commandments from a place in my head to a place in my heart. God's justice orders all things according to love. The goal, I learned, was not to measure myself by these rules, or by trying to make no mistakes or missteps. This is an impossible goal.

Spending time with them with God in prayer helped gradually to expand my capacity for love and compassion toward others. For me to know these commandments more as positive calls to just and loving action, rather than only as the boundaries for what *not* to do. At the same time, I came to experience more deeply God's love, boundless mercy, and forgiveness.

In recent years, the first commandment is the one most often in my prayer. To have God—and God alone—as the center of my life. Every day. All day. So many people, tasks, tragedies, world problems, books, TV, social media, etc., compete for this central place day by day.

God patiently waits for me—for each of us—to give some space, some time with silence and openness enough to allow ourselves to hear the words we most need right then, e.g., *I love you, I forgive you, let me share your burdens.*

Always a unique word from God, just for me or for you, just right for the moment. My frequent question as I pray with this first commandment is, "What am I allowing to crowd into that central place in me that's meant for God alone?"

Turning to the Gospel, we have the story of Jesus driving the merchants and money-changers out of the temple. I was astonished the first time I was at a meeting with businessmen who cited this story as proof that, since Jesus took violent actions, violence could be justified, even up to and including war. (more)

This story was the proof that war can be okay? I pondered this and prayed over it.

Later, I read an excerpt from John Dear, the well-known teacher of nonviolence, where he commented on this Gospel story.

He described Jesus' actions as "nonviolent civil disobedience" and pointed out that the story does not say that Jesus hurt anyone or even yelled at anyone. He noted, "Jesus stayed centered in his relationship with God."

Even throughout his passion and death, Jesus remained peaceful and nonviolent with no outbursts of anger or rage.

In the scripture, the writer says Jesus' motivation was "zeal for God's house." This meant concern about actions against the First Commandment. The Temple was a place to worship the One God. It had one purpose: worship. Jesus was always centered in his relationship with God.

Both of these readings are about loving relationships—about living in a loving relationship with God and with our neighbors. I believe there is no end to the depth of love that God is eager to share with us.

Making time for prayer every day is a good way to deepen our capacity to think, speak, and act out of love. Definitely a good way, but often not so easy.