

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

Exodus 20:1-17; Psalm 19; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25; John 2:13-22

There are people who stick post-it notes all over the dashboard of their car to make sure they remember all their errands.

Kitchen calendars fill up with family appointments. Many cell phones include calendars so their owners can have instant access to appointments that are too numerous to remember.

Chronic stress accompanies an increasing number of Canadians who feel busy beyond measure. It's a common problem for the current generation, even among the retired. People are so overwhelmed that one of our greatest luxuries is free time.

Busy-ness intrudes on all of us because we have so many opportunities, and because we want everything, and more. We have become slaves to what we desire, not what we need. We have become possessed by our activities, our getting and spending and doing. Living beyond our means. No boundaries to keep us in check.

Make a list of what we do in the course of a normal week and rank them in priority. Begin each day by completing item number one before attending to item number two, and complete number two before going to number three. The next day, take out the list and start with number one again and repeat the process. Do the same each and every day. Don't worry if you fail to reach lower items on your priority list.

Following this example would be a good way for Christians to set priorities and follow them. This might free us from the busy-ness that we have fallen subject to. Following today's reading

from Exodus would make that task easier.

The Ten Commandments begins with a reminder that it is God who first leads us from that which enslaves us. “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, you shall have no other gods but me.”

God’s commandments can free us from excessive busy-ness, too much wanting everything. God’s commandments lay out boundaries and help us set priorities by God’s standards.

Look at the list in the Exodus 20 reading for today. This stripped down list of ten priorities provides us with a time-honored, but too-often-neglected, guide for daily living. The Ten Commandments provide a simple rule for living life. The Great Commandment in the Eucharist service, the “Hear O Israel”, helps us even further by grouping the ten into two basic priorities. First, is our duty to believe and trust in God and second is our duty to care for and respect our neighbors. Simply said, we put God first and put nothing in God’s place. The Catechism in The Book of Common Prayer, helps us understand deeper meanings of not making idols, not misusing God’s name, and keeping holy the Sabbath day. We show love for God and obedience to him in “thought, word, and deed.” We set aside special time for reflection on “God’s ways” through worshipping with our fellow believers, and praying and studying about the things of God that are our priority. The second priority is to love our neighbors in the same way we want to be loved. Again, the Catechism expands our understanding of honoring parents and refraining from murder, adultery, stealing, bearing false witness, and coveting what is our neighbor’s.

We “love, honor, and help our parents” and others, it is a partnership, for the sake of God, with those who teach us and lead us into the way of Christ. We honor human life, work for

peace, rid our hearts of hatred, and seek to become one with what God has created.

We deal with others honestly and fairly, and we work for justice in the world around us, both near and far. We seek freedom where it does not exist. We share the precious resources of this planet with others who are in need.

We do not simply refrain from lying, but we exercise the courage to tell the truth. We are careful “not to mislead others by our silence.” We resist the all-too-human temptation to have what is not ours. We guard against desires that lead us to “envy, greed, and jealousy.” Rather, we look with happiness and thanksgiving at the success of others and what they possess. In the process of living according to these commandments, we continue to uncover for ourselves the richness of what each means.

The list of Ten Commandments need not complicate our thinking, because each is a part of one whole: duty to and love for God and fellow human beings. Our Lord Jesus Christ reminds us of this with The Great Commandment, the Shema:

“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commands hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

At the beginning of each day, let’s lay aside our calendars and day planners and lists of things to do. Rather, let us turn to the top item on our list of priorities, loving God and loving neighbor, and tend to it before we move on to the next thing.

Then maybe, our problem of busy-ness, our rush to fulfill so many wants and desires, will cease to make us anxious, and the success of our personal lives will be secured.

AMEN.