



## The Liberty of Love

*This column is taken from a homily given at St. Francis of Assisi in Bend on September 1-2.*

Today we resume this year's regular readings from the Gospel of Mark after a five-week detour through the Gospel of John's profound teaching on the Bread of Life.

We re-connect with Mark after the first reading from the Book of Deuteronomy. "In your observance of the commandments of . . . your God," Moses tells the people, ". . . you shall not add to what I command you nor subtract from it." These words resonate in Mark's report of Jesus' sharp rebuke to the Pharisees of His day: "You disregard God's commandment but cling to human tradition."

So after five weeks of teaching on the Bread of Life, this Sunday's readings from both Old Testament and New draw our attention to the Law of God. It's only natural to ask: Is there some deep-running connection between the Law and the Eucharist?

First, let's consider the Law. Moses tells the Israelites they must observe God's commandments in order to "enter in and take possession of the *land* which the Lord, the God of your fathers, is giving to you"--the land which God promised to the descendants of Abraham forever. What land is that?

It is the Promised Land of *Freedom*, because it has been the Israelites' destination since their narrow escape from *slavery* in Egypt. The God

of Israel shows Himself to be the God Who comes down to set His People free. The Law of Israel's God, therefore, is always and everywhere the *Law of Freedom*. It tells us how to get to the Promised Land of Freedom, how to take possession of it, how to make true freedom our own.

The tablets of the Law Moses brought down the mountain from God had two sides. One side tells us what *not* to do: "Thou shalt not be a *slave!*" Don't worship false gods; you'll make yourself a slave to empty idols. Don't tell lies; you'll enslave yourself to self-deception. Don't steal; you'll make yourself a slave to your desire to have more and more and more. Don't commit adultery; you'll enslave yourself to soul-corroding fantasy and lust. Don't kill; you'll make yourself a slave to the demons of anger, resentment, and rage.

"All these evils come from within," Jesus tells us in the Gospel, "and they defile." They lead us farther and farther away from the Promised Land of Freedom. They make us progressively less and less free to be who we can truly be. That's why the God of the Promise forbids them.

The other side of Moses' tablets--the positive side--tells us what to do: "*live in freedom*" (Galatians 5:13). Live free to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. Live free to love your neighbor as yourself. Live free to go on discovering true freedom by living out God's Law of Freedom to the end of your days.

In the Breaking of the Bread the Law of Freedom finds its perfect fulfillment. Like

Moses's tablets of the Law, the Sacred Host has two sides, and they convey to us the two-fold Law of the Eucharist, promulgated anew at the Consecration of every Mass.

One side of the Host has to do with "what comes from without." It says, "Take and eat." Feed on the flesh-taking, cross-bearing freedom of the Son of God. He hands Himself over to you out of the infinite liberty of Love. Nourish your soul with the food of freedom prepared for you by the Creator Who made you to be free in Him forever.

The other side of the Host concerns "what comes from within." It tells us, "Do this in memory of Me." Hand yourself over like Jesus to the world's insatiable hunger for love. Freely become food for the freedom of others that they may consume your love for Him and live.

According to St. James, "every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of Lights." What greater gift will ever come down to you than the freedom to love as God loves? Follow the Law of God to the Promised Land of the Eucharist: receive what you will become, and become what you receive.