

Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle A
June 1, 2008

Readings: Deuteronomy 11:18, 26-28, 32; Romans 3:21-25, 28; Matthew 7:21-27

Rock Solid Conscience

This is always a special Mass for me because I get to address all these young people in their caps and gowns; all these young men and women ready to begin a new stage in their lives. This is the 4th year that I have had the opportunity to speak at the graduate mass here at Sacred Heart, but this one is a little more personal for me. And that is because three of these graduates have been active in the youth group ever since Jenni and I took over leadership of the group three years ago. Monica, Katelyn, and Courtney have traveled a journey with us and helped us to figure out how to make it work; and they have traveled to Steubenville the last two summers with us for the youth conference and they will be going again in a few weeks. Knowing some of the graduates personally helps me to relate a little better to the rest of the group as well. I can better appreciate that your experiences are a lot different in many ways than mine were when I graduated from high school 38 years ago.

Times change. Society changes. Fashions change. Music changes. But there are some things that never change - like God's laws and commandments. That's what we hear in our readings this morning. We hear Moses say: *"Take these words of mine into your heart and soul. Bind them at your wrist as a sign, and let them be a pendant on your forehead. I set before you here this day, a blessing and a curse: a blessing for obeying the commandments of the Lord your God, ... a curse if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord, your God"* Our call to obey God's commandments hasn't changed in the last 3000 some years, but some of our customs have changed. Moses specified that all the Jewish males over age 13 should wear two little pendants, or boxes, call phylacteries during times of prayer; one on their arm and one on the forehead. These boxes contained small pieces of parchment containing excerpts from the law and commandments. The law would be close to their thoughts and actions.

As Christians we don't do this; it was a man-made custom that we have not carried over from the Jews. In fact Jesus criticized the Pharisees for abusing the practice by "widening their phylacteries", by making their boxes bigger to call attention to themselves and act like they were better and holier than the rest.

No, we don't keep the law and commandments in little boxes on our wrist and forehead any longer; although I can imagine someone trying to start a new fashion trend. But we do need to keep them in our heart and soul just as Moses instructed. And Jesus has sent His Spirit to each and every one of us to place them there. St. Paul talking about the Gentiles, that's us the non-Jews, says that we already have the law written on our hearts.

We have God's law written on heart, but sometimes it easy for that law to get jumbled up by the time it moves up to our heads. For it is in our mind that our consciences reside. Our consciences guide our decisions and give us direction about right and wrong, but this direction is based on knowledge, not just feelings. Our consciences instruct us what we ought to do and what we ought not do, but first our consciences must

be formed and educated. Otherwise we will not make good decisions; we will choose what we want, what feels good to us, not what is truly good for us.

If you haven't already, you probably will meet a well-meaning evangelical Christian who will tell you that all you need to do is to say a "Jesus prayer" and you will be saved; that it is about faith in your heart, and not about your actions. But that's not what Jesus tells us. Your faith must consist in more than saying you believe in Jesus. Jesus tells us in the gospel today that it is not enough to say "**Lord, Lord.**" He says that we must listen to His words and act on them and then we will be like wise men who build our houses on rock.

You graduates are marking a milestone in your lives. You have been living in your parents' homes built on rock. You have received good foundations; you are worshipping God here in church this morning as the law and commandments tell us. But soon you will be moving out on your own to take more responsibility for your own lives. You will build your own houses and it is important that you build them on rock, and not on sand, so that your faith will be solid; so that your faith will be strong to survive the storms and pressures that society will throw at you.

And you build your house strong by building and forming your conscience. The Catechism states: "***Conscience must be informed and moral judgment enlightened. A well-formed conscience is upright and truthful. It formulates its judgments according to reason, in conformity with the true good willed by the wisdom of the Creator. The education of conscience is indispensable for human beings who are subjected to negative influences and tempted by sin to prefer their own judgment and to reject authoritative teachings.***" (CCC #1783) Anyone here been subjected to negative influences? Anyone here been tempted by sin to prefer your own judgments and to reject authoritative teachings of the Church? We all have.

You form your conscience by learning what God and the Church say about, for example, fornication, i.e. having sexual relations with someone you are not married to; not by simply deciding it *feels* like it should be okay. You form your conscience by learning why the Church teaches that all life should be respected from conception to natural death, not by deciding that it *seems* right that everyone should be free to choose for themselves. You form your conscience by learning about your responsibility to tithe and give to the poor and to the church, not by *feeling* that you are free to spend your money any way you want to make you feel good. You form your conscience by learning about your responsibility to attend Mass every Sunday, and not by how good it *feels* to sleep in or how inconvenient it is to your schedule. For your house to be solid, it must be formed based on moral absolutes that cannot be changed just because you find them inconvenient.

And fortunately, Christ left us His Church with Peter and his successors to guide us in learning and knowing God's commands and applying them to the issues of our times. And the Church has given us the Catechism as a blueprint for building a strong house. Follow that blueprint and not the suggestions of some rock star, sports hero, movie icon, or some good friend who tells you: "If it feels good, do it."

I probably sound like an old moral fuddy-duddy, but a lot is at stake. Jesus makes that very clear for us. Let me read His words to you one more time lest we forget: "***Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. ... And everyone who listens to these***

words of mine but does not act on them will be like a fool who built his house on sand. The rain fell, the floods came, and the wind blew and buffeted the house. And it collapsed and was completely ruined.” Be careful not to build your life on the shifting sands of society’s standards, for it may collapse and you will find yourself in eternal ruin. And there could be no greater tragedy. Stay close to the Church; let her be your guide. She will give you the assistance and strength and knowledge to do the will of the Father. And then you will enter the kingdom of heaven some day; the only goal that is really important in the end. Set goals for yourselves as you move into the future, but do not let any of them interfere with this most important of goals. May God bless you all.

Deacon Joe Hulway