

4 - The Covenant,

LAW and LOVE

God is your friend. He makes promises and keeps them. He offers you eternal life as a free gift. All you have to do is accept it. But that acceptance is to be a total acceptance. If you can think of all the things you would most want, nothing actually compares to friendship with God the infinite source of all that is good. Anything good actually comes from God.

What is friendship?

Friendship is sharing myself with another and accepting the other as they are. Best friends share everything - they hold no secrets. God wants to share everything with us, even his very self. That is why He is our best friend. Let's hear it from the over 2000 bishops at Vatican II who agreed with this.

"in His goodness and wisdom God chose to reveal Himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of His will (see Eph 1:9) by which through Christ, the Word made flesh, man might in the Holy Spirit have access to the Father and come to share in the divine nature (see Eph. 2:18; 2 Peter 1:4). Through this revelation, therefore, the invisible God (see Col 1, 1:15, 1 Tim 1:17) out of the abundance of His love speaks to men as friends (see Ex 33:11; John 15:14-15) and lives among them (see Bar 3:38), so that He may invite and take them into fellowship with Himself." (DV 2)

That means, God calls you His friend and wants to share his divine nature with you. To make you like God. Not bad if you ask me. To understand this gift in a deeper way, we must look at how God made his promises in the past. One special key to understanding this friendship with God, are the 'agreements' or covenants he made in the past.

Covenants

A covenant is an agreement enacted between two people or groups in which one or both make promises to do or not do something. They usually have some rewards and punishments for doing or not doing the required actions.

God's desire is not just to 'give' something, but to actually give his very self. So covenant actually becomes friendship. God gives himself to us and invites us to give ourselves to God. This leads to union. You are never alone if you are a Christian. You have all the angels, saints and God himself as friends. Welcome to the new and eternal covenant.

But to understand the full grandeur of this friendship, we must see how God has worked over centuries to make this clear to us. Remember, covenant can mean to just do something, but it is really about giving our very selves to each other which is friendship. The Bible is broken up into the Old Testament and the New Testament. Another word for testament is covenant - so we can say, the old covenant and the new covenant. The "Old Covenant has never been revoked" (CCC 121). So we can also call them, the books of the old eternal friendship and the books of the new eternal friendship. In these books, we have the covenant expressed to us. The Catholic Catechism uses the word 'covenant' 164 times (CCC stands for Catechism of the Catholic Church - we will refer to many beautiful quotes from the Catechism to explain this).

The 3 Early Covenants/Promises

Noah: In Genesis 9:8-17 God promises that 'never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth' (Gen 9:11). The rainbow was the sign of this covenant.

Abraham: Abraham believed God and so he became the 'father' of faith. He and Sarah are the original historical parents of all the Jews. Though Abraham and Sarah were old, Abraham still believed that God would give him a son, which he did, Isaac. Jews, Christians and Moslems all have Abraham as our father of faith. We are all children of Abraham, we worship the same God.

Here is God's promise to Abraham. "The LORD said to Abram: "Go forth from the land of your kinsfolk and from your father's house to a **land** that I will show you. I will make of you a great **nation**, and I will bless you; I will make your **name great**, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. **All** the communities of the earth shall **find blessing in you.**" (emphasis added) Let us focus on the words in bold.

"**name great**" A line of Kings. Abraham's dynasty finds fulfilment in the promise God makes with King David, that an heir of his will rule on the throne forever.

"**land ... nation**" Moses fulfils this with the covenant God makes with his people at Mt. Sinai.

"**All ... find blessing in you**" Blessing of all nations comes from Jesus and the new and eternal covenant in his blood.

Abraham asked God, "How am I to know that I shall possess it?" So God ratified (used a ritual to indicate) his promise of the land with an ancient way covenants (major agreements). In those days they were sealed with a sacrifice. One or more animals were cut in half and the two parties would walk through the remains, which were placed one set

of halves on one side, the other on the other side. This meant that if you broke the agreement, you would end up like those animals! What is special about the covenant with Abraham is, that only God walked between the animals. That means, if God didn't keep his promise he was prepared to die. See for yourself, read Gen 15.

David: In 2 Samuel 7:12-16 God promises King David that his line of kingship will be established forever. We understand this to mean Jesus who is the king of kings and who rules forever.

THE COVENANT AT SINAI

This is the most important covenant in the Old Testament. In the ancient world great nations would make a covenant with weaker powers. The great nation would promise to protect the weaker power if the weaker power would pay the necessary taxes. If the weaker power did not pay up, then the greater power would destroy the weaker power. The covenant is the way military and political powers made pacts/alliances. The Babylonians destroyed Israel in 587BC because they did not bow to Babylon. Israel realised they were destroyed because they were not faithful to God.

The following table represents the connections between a typical covenant of the time, the Covenant at Sinai and the New and eternal covenant with Jesus. We will explore the covenant with Jesus in more detail.

"Therefore, if you hearken to my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my special possession, dearer to me than all other people, though all the earth is mine. You shall be to me a kingdom of priests, a holy nation. " (Ex 19: 5-6)

God makes a covenant with Israel, to be their God and for Israel to be God's people. By making a covenant with the one true God (as opposed to the many gods from all over Ancient world), Israel could become a source of unity in the world. No longer is there to be division between nations. No longer is there to be many gods, but one God who is loving and merciful. Thus, Israel is to become a source of God's presence in the world.



Due to modern Sensitivities we cannot show you this cartoon which showed a modern equivalent of the covenant with Abraham, using the family dog, cat and Birdie.



Ancient Covenant	Covenant at Sinai	Jesus
<p>1. Identification of the covenant giver</p> <p>Who offered the covenant. Eg Egypt offered Israel a covenant</p>	<p>God, Yahweh offers the covenant who saved Israel. "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bandage" (Ex 20:2)</p>	<p>1) Jesus offers a covenant at the last supper with the wine cup, "Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."</p> <p>2) Jesus fulfils the covenant: Mt 11:2-6 the blind receive sight, the deaf ...</p>
<p>2. Historical prologue: The good things the person who offers the covenant has done. Eg the past benefits Egypt has done for Israel.</p>		
<p>3. Stipulations: What both persons/groups will do as part of the agreement. Israel will pay taxes, Egypt will protect Israel if attacked.</p>	<p>The ten commandments is the way the Israelites will fulfil the covenant. The law is part of the covenant</p>	<p>Jesus says, "I have not come to abolish the law, but to fulfil it... not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. " (Mt 5:17,18)</p>
<p>4. Deposit and public reading: A way to renew the covenant every year. Eg The covenant to be publicly read each year.</p>	<p>Passover</p>	<p>The Bible is read at every Mass and should be part of prayer.</p>
<p>5. Witnesses: Who can confirm that the covenant took place if need be. Eg All the Egyptian gods and God.</p>	<p>During a later covenant, Joshua used a stone as a witness (Josh 24:26,27)</p>	<p>The Greek word for witness is martyr. Everyone who dies for Jesus is a witness to God's love.</p>
<p>6. Blessings and Curses: The benefits of the covenant and what would happen if you broke it. Eg If Israel broke the covenant, it would be destroyed.</p>	<p>All things go well if you follow the covenant, or disaster if not. See Deut 28 for the details</p>	<p>Heaven or Hell. Mt 25:31-46</p>
<p>7. Ratification: How the covenant was 'sealed'. Animals were sacrificed to represent what would happen to someone who broke the covenant. Sometimes a meal was eaten together to seal the covenant.. Eg The king of Israel and the Egyptian representative walked between sacrificed animals, then enjoyed a meal together.</p>	<p>1) Word: Moses spoke the covenant, and the people agreed Ex 19:8, 24:3</p> <p>2) Animal sacrifice: Ex 24:5-8</p> <p>3) Meal together: Ex 24:11</p>	<p>Every Mass has the reading of the Word, the sacrifice of Jesus and we eat the Eucharist.</p>

JESUS IS MORE THAN THE FULFILLMENT OF THE OLD COVENANT

"The coming of God's Son to earth is an event of such immensity that God willed to prepare for it over centuries. He makes everything converge on Christ: all the rituals and sacrifices, figures and symbols of the "First Covenant". He announces him through the mouths of the prophets who succeeded one another in Israel. Moreover, he awakens in the hearts of the pagans a dim expectation of this coming." (CCC 522)

Jesus is God's gift of himself to us. By being friends with Jesus, we are friends with God. Jesus makes a bond with us at every Mass when he offers us his own body and blood. The blood is the new and eternal covenant a bond of friendship forever! His body and blood is God himself, Jesus body, soul and divinity.

Covenant is agreed self-gift
Covenant is eternal friendship
Covenant is the bond of love

Jesus fulfilled the covenant by loving during his whole life and not sinning. His sacrifice (the punishment of our sin) meant we can be forgiven of our sins. He took upon himself our sin, out of love and friendship for us. He then offers us his friendship, his covenant to us. This bond begins at baptism when we offer ourselves to him and enter into his death and resurrection. At the Eucharist we enter again into his death and resurrection, we receive Jesus into us and are invited to give of ourselves totally to him, just like he gave himself totally to us. As Pope Benedict XVI put it, 'through submission to God comes union' (WYD 2006). We become one with God and share in the divine nature forever. Eternal friendship.

THE EUCHARIST

The Eucharist is the most special thing you can do together with your divine friend, Jesus. It is specially designed by Him for you to experience His love. At the heart of it is Jesus giving himself to you in what appears to be bread and wine, but is in fact, his own body and blood. Jesus unites himself with you through the Eucharist. Please, when you receive the Eucharist, be mindful of this eternal, divine gift and open your heart to his love. Sit with him in silence and love him and be loved by him.

New Improved Covenant!

No animal sacrifice!
No more blood stains on your
jeans!

Jerusalem Ecumenical Study of
Universal Salvation has developed
the

Eucharist!

Wine flavoured blood of the
eternal sacrifice universally
available at a Mass near you!

Union with God guaranteed by the death and
resurrection of Jesus.

This is the heart of this friendship when he wants to share all of his love and divinity with you and receive all of you into him. All your pain, hopes, desires, even your very self. Union, love, friendship, Covenant.

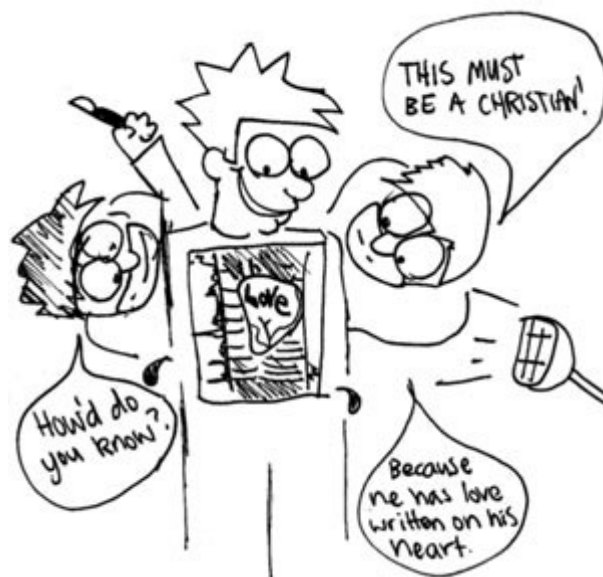
THE LAW, GRACE AND LOVE

In the movie 'The Dish', scientists were maintaining the Radio Telescope at Parkes in Australia which was going to receive the signal from the lunar Lander for the first ever moon walk, 1969. The scientists lost the signal and couldn't calculate where they needed to point the telescope to pick up the signal. They eventually realized if they pointed it at the moon, it would be close enough to pick up the signal sufficiently for the guidance system to zero in on the Lander. It worked.

This is an analogy of the relationship between law, grace and love. The signal we are trying to pick up is how to love, what does God want me to do? On our own, we can't do it. The moon is like God's law, it is sufficiently close for us to pick up the signal of the Holy Spirit. If the signal we zero in on leads us away from the moon, we know we are off track and must start again. Once we have picked up the signal of the Holy Spirit we can truly follow God's promptings and come into deep friendship with God.

The Ten Commandments: God expected the Israelites to follow the ten commandments to fulfil the Sinai covenant. This should be enough to live in sufficient personal relationship with God to be his friend and live a life of love.

The 613 precepts of the Law: Observant Jews even today follow the 613 precepts of the law. These are contained in the first five books of the Bible we call the Pentateuch, Jews call the Torah, or law. This includes the 10 commandments. The Torah comprises the entire code of Jewish conduct - civil law, religious law, ritual law and ethical law. These were the laws the Jews followed during Jesus' time.



"According to Christian tradition, the Law is holy, spiritual, and good, yet still imperfect. Like a tutor it shows what must be done, but does not of itself give the strength, the grace of the spirit to fulfil it." (CCC 1963)

Jesus corrected the old law. For example, the old law forbids pork to be eaten, yet Jesus teaches that all food can be eaten (Mk 7:19). Jesus says, "I have not come to abolish the law, but to fulfil it ... not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished." (Mt 5:17,18) Jesus teaches us about God's perfect law.

"The New Law or the Law of the Gospel is the perfection here on earth of the divine law, natural and revealed. It is the work of Christ as expressed particularly in the Sermon on the Mount. It is also the work of the Holy Spirit and through him becomes the interior law of charity. "I will establish a New Covenant with the house of Israel ... I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." (Jer 31:31-34) (CCC 1965)

"The New law is the *grace of the Holy Spirit* given to the faithful through faith in Christ. It works through charity; it uses the Sermon on the Mount to teach us what must be done and makes use of the sacraments to give us the grace to do it." (CCC 1966)

"The Law of the Gospel "fulfils," refines, surpasses, and leads the Old Law to its perfection. In the beatitudes, the New Law *fulfils the divine promises* by elevating and orienting them toward the 'Kingdom of heaven.'" (CCC 1967)

"The entire Law of the Gospel is contained in the '*new commandment*' of Jesus, to love one another as he has loved us." (CCC 1970)

Catholicism is a spiritual religion. The Law still holds, and we must follow it. But it is only a guide for us to experience the personal friendship of God. The law teaches us how to love, and as we love we give of ourselves to others and to God. We also receive God and this mutual self gift leads us deeper into friendship and union with God.

THIS WEEK'S PASSAGES

We begin the second cycle this week with Jesus establishing the 12 apostles. He was rejected by the Pharisees who joined forces with the Herodians seeking to destroy him. This set back made Jesus realize he would ultimately be rejected by Israel (12 tribes), so he sets up the Church (12 apostles). Jesus is clearly establishing his kingdom, based on doing God's will. What is God's will?

GOD'S WILL

The Beatitudes
(the sermon on the mount)

Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are the meek: for they shall possess the land.

Blessed are they who mourn: for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice: for they shall have their fill.

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure of heart: for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called children of God.

Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.



We can sum up this week's message as God offering his friendship through Jesus. The more we give of ourselves to Jesus, the more we will experience his friendship. If we allow Jesus to love us, by spending time in prayer, and living the sacraments, then we will get to know him and our hearts will slowly become more loving through the action of the Holy Spirit. As we become more loving, we will fulfill God's law more and more and thus, Jesus becomes our king, the person who we obey through His laws. It is time now to ensure we are more committed to what Jesus calls us to, daily prayer and sacraments. If we are to live a life of the Spirit, we must be getting to weekly Mass and praying daily. We should also aim to have regular confession, the aim is monthly. We can say this is God's will for us.

Day 1 Summary of healings and exorcisms Mk: 3:7-12

Why do you think Jesus ordered the evil spirits to not make him known?

This is actually an important point since some say this was added to the gospel. It is called the 'Messianic secret' and there are many interpretations of it. Let us first realise we are talking about the actions of God. There may not be a single reason, but many reasons. Scripture will never be exhausted of all the possible meanings. Scripture is always new and fresh every time we read it. Be open as you read to fresh ideas and insights. To God's love. The special reflections that you receive are important and gently lead us on God's path. There are some common suggestions for Jesus actions. One is humility. Jesus does not big note himself. The other is to seek to win over the Pharisees by being humble. Great people have a 'wall' of fame that separates them from the ordinary people. Often famous people can be lonely, because people love them for their fame, rather than for themselves. Jesus wants to build real relationships with the Pharisees, just as he seeks to build real relationships with us.

Day 2 Institution of the Twelve The Choice of the Twelve Mk 3:13-19

What is represented by '12'?

Jesus has been rejected by the Pharisees and Jewish leaders who seek to destroy him. This does not stop him, but propels him to action and establish something incredible. Jesus is laying the foundation of a new institution. This is the start of the Church, the new Israel. When we read the gospels, we discover elements that are similar to the OT, such as the 12 tribes and the 12 apostles. Can you think of other similarities?

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Some say, Jesus was anti-institution. Very clearly this is not the case. Jesus establishes a new institution and he nurtures it as we will see. Jesus has no problem with authority, nor of establishing authority, because it is always to be an authority of love and service.

Day 3 Institution of the Twelve The Choice of the Twelve Mk 3:13-19

Jesus named James and John, 'the sons of thunder'. We can have nicknames for our friends - so does Jesus. He very clearly had fun with his men, including establishing nicknames for them.

Judas is also named as the traitor. Do you think Jesus knew Judas would betray him?

It is good to reflect and discuss this point, because we deepen in our understanding of Jesus divinity and humanity.

Jesus was a master of organisational structure and development. By now he had many disciples and he now chooses 12 to be special leaders. He is setting up a chain of command, leaders, and limits on those who he will not see as much. He will concentrate his efforts on these 12 men. He makes the decisions. He developed special friendships with these men and not so much others. He knew his limits.

How do you lead others? What is your style of leadership?

Day 4 Christ and Beelzebub Mk 3:20-27

"a kingdom divided against itself will not stand" Can you think of organisations that fell apart because it was divided against itself?

One of the 'proofs' of the Catholic Church being the true Church is that after 2000 years, it is still standing even though at many times it was divided against itself. It has the longest line of leadership for any institution in the world today.

With the establishment of the 12, Jesus is also making a statement about the Church to be united. We should all seek to encourage others and speak well of everyone.

Day 5 "Eternal Sin" Mk 3:28-30

What do you think a sin against the Holy Spirit is?

The Catechism states the answer clearly:

""Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven."¹³⁶ There are no limits to the mercy of God, but anyone who deliberately refuses to accept his mercy by repenting, rejects the forgiveness of his sins and the salvation offered by the Holy Spirit.¹³⁷ Such hardness of heart can lead to final impenitence and eternal loss. " (CCC 1864)

Day 6 The Friends of Jesus Mk 3:31-35

Who is Jesus' brothers, sisters and mothers?

One of the joys of following Jesus is the new friendships, of new 'brothers', 'sisters' and 'mothers'. As we do God's will we develop new relationships. These are eternal relationships, eternal friendships.

Day 7 The Friends of Jesus Mk 3:31-35

Do you think Jesus was rejecting his own mother?

Who besides Jesus does the Father's will perfectly? Mary - she is the handmaiden of the Lord. She has not sinned. She perfectly performs God's will. What Jesus is doing is highlighting that doing God's will is even more important than blood relationships. Jesus' relationship with Mary is taken to a higher order since it is based on doing God's love. Following God is more important than anything, even family. But God calls us to love our family. Through loving God, we are better able to love our family.

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