"The Commandments: A Focus on the Second"

As we’ve begun this season of Lent, our scriptures this weekend focus on sin and our need for repentance. This is a season of conversion and often we use the Ten Commandments as a way to examine our choices and whether we are truly placing God first in our lives. Every one of the Ten Commandments is broken daily, but the Second Commandment seems to be broken by the most people with the least sense of guilt. In a store recently I heard an entire family, the youngest child to the parents, in conversation using the Lord’s name in vain and dropping the ‘f’ bomb like common speech. Few can claim not to have spoken one of the names of God to express feelings very far from awe and praise, and many people use holy names are expressions or as normal speech, with no meaning behind the words at all.

Our culture’s loss of the sense of the sacredness of God’s name is nearly complete, and with it has come a loss of the sense of God and the sacred in our lives. God gave us this commandment because He knew of the connection between what we say and how we think and feel. Words do hurt because there is meaning and intention behind them. Contemptuous words show contempt; careless words show a lack of care; thoughtless words show how far one is from the mind of the person speaking them. Words reflect our minds and our hearts, and they in turn shape our thoughts, ideas and feelings.

It is common human experience that knowing someone’s name is the beginning of a relationship, and by introducing ourselves to someone we are offering the same opportunity. This is true of God as well. By giving us his name, God reveals himself to us, offers us the opportunity to believe in him, and initiates a relationship of intimacy and trust. By praying God’s name, we offer adoration; by speaking it, we can offer praise and glory and show God greater respect.

In addition to everyday speech, there are special occasions when profaning the name of God is especially wrong. The most important of these is calling on God to guarantee a promise or false oath. God has forbidden this: (Lv 19:12). When we make a promise or take oaths in God’s name, we not only pledge our own truthfulness but God’s truthfulness and authority as well. The taking of oaths must be reserved to only the most serious of reasons.

The most terrible misuse of God’s name is blasphemy; it is by its nature a mortal sin. In thoughts or words, the blasphemer goes beyond disrespect to animosity or hatred of God, or defiance toward him. In deeds, the blasphemer uses God’s name to carry out evil acts. Sadly, we are familiar with a great many people, our own Church included, who use or have used God’s name to torture, terrorize, or kill others.

“Freedom of speech” is an excellent part of civic life. However, the person who does not guard his or her tongue has not yet achieved the deep inner conversion that is the mark of the true Christian. We must consciously and conscientiously purge ourselves of profanity, blasphemy, cursing and vulgarity.

God bless,
Fr. Jerry