

“LET YOUR MANNER OF LIFE BE WORTHY...”

Very Reverend Glenn Jones

Vicar General, Vicar for Clergy, Vicar for Religious

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You know, it’s usual for us to want to be remembered when we are gone—to have left some sort of admirable legacy. But I was re-reading the Biblical book 2 Chronicles recently—probably among the least-read books of the Bible since it goes over a lot of the same history as does 2 Kings—and re-encountered a rather tragic phrase: “...he departed with no one’s regret.” (2 Chronicles 21:20).

Ouch.

Who merited such an unfortunate epitaph? None other than a king—Jehoram of the kingdom of Judah, whose manner of life was so offensive to God that “... the Lord smote him in his bowels with an incurable disease ... at the end of two years, his bowels came out because of the disease, and he died in great agony. His people made no fire in his honor, like the fires made for his fathers...” (vv. 18-19) Ooooo ... BIG ouch! Why? Not only had Jehoram murdered his brothers after his ascent to the throne, but he had led his kingdom in the ways of infidelity to God, erasing in a short time his father King Jehosaphat’s 25-year sincere (albeit imperfect) efforts to return Judah *closer* to God. As the knight in the Indiana Jones movie meme-ishly observed: [“He chose...poorly”](#).

I recalled these verses while reviewing the Catholic Mass reading for this Sunday—the excerpt from Exodus 20 in which God gives the Ten Commandments to Moses on Mt. Sinai (aka, Mt. Horeb). These commandments, of course, involve some of the basic building blocks upon which *any* successful society is built: honoring and respecting parents (and by extension, legitimate authority), protecting persons’ right to life and well-being, respect for others’ possessions, fidelity to relationships, honesty, and integrity, etc. But also for the Jews, it was honoring no other “gods” other than the one true God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob ... and now of Jews and Christians today. He who is “I AM.”

But one need not be Christian or Jew to understand the importance of the Ten Commandments in life. Want your life to go to pot? Start breaking even the non-worship-related Commandments, and it’ll go downhill pretty quickly. One would find that many of the early Jewish laws did not have to do so much with worship but rather with simply respecting other persons, health, etc.; read Leviticus, especially for more detail.

One can also find that, while certainly addressed in the Old Testament as well, the New Testament has a lot of references to sexual morality—some of the most ignored or dismissed in all of scripture in our day, even though even Jesus Himself emphasized chastity (Matthew 15:19, Mark 7:21, John 8). After all, when the scriptures speak copiously and emphatically concerning sexual morality and then think about how our “anything goes” sexual standards these days, the Christian at least will see a tremendous (and worrisome) disconnect.

But it has always been that way, really; when one reads the Old Testament, the Israelites often fell into pagan fertility rites and fertility worship ... to their demise. Even at the foot of Mt. Sinai and after having witnessed the great works of God firsthand, the Israelites fell into worshipping a golden bull calf (symbolizing wealth, strength, and sexual prowess) and then “rose up to play” (Exodus 32:6). Well, one can bet that they weren’t playing Monopoly.

In our day, Christian precepts of morality are disregarded as old-fashioned or outdated, to the point that young people don’t even know they exist. But what are they really? None of God’s instruction is meant as an arbitrary exercise, but rather, all had real purpose. Sexual morals are not concerned only with out-of-wedlock children, but even more so in respect for persons in their totality—protecting and honoring the persons as children of God, and not using them, or being used, simply for throwaway self-gratification.

These divinely inspired precepts also protected and honored the great gift of sexuality, in which parents become co-creators with God Himself of a new image of themselves ... and of Him. For

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each of us touches the divine in that way; we are dim reflections of God Himself ... ever clearer the more we reflect His goodness and holiness, yet ever dimming the more we do not. But chastity honors the self and the other person in his/her wholeness. As St. Paul teaches: “Shun immorality. Every other sin which a man commits is outside the body; but the immoral man sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? ... So glorify God in your body.” (1 Corinthians 6:18-20)

Yes, these are part of the way that we “let [our] manner of life be worthy.” (Philippians 1:27)—the Ten Commandments and sexual morality. But ... what other guidance do scriptures give that can be efficacious even in secular arenas?

Ah, young padawan ... come near and hear a few of many references that light the path to goodness.

“Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience, forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.” (Colossians 3:12-13)

“...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law.” (Galatians 5:22-23)

“... through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world ... and become partakers of the divine nature ... supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.” (2 Peter 1:4-7)

“Worthiness” is a matter of the will. But ... “will” we do it? We Christians hope ... and pray ... that opening the heart to pursue virtue will open the fountain of grace, leading to ever strengthening faith.