

Blessed by God's law

“Blessed the man who follows not the counsel of the wicked...but delights in the law of the Lord.” Mt 20:15

The first verse of the Psalter reveals the way to happiness: namely, to delight in the law of the Lord. To delight in God's law implies far more than grudgingly submitting, or even dutifully doing what the Lord commands. This is because of the nature of God's law.

Notice in Psalm One, and indeed in all the Psalms, the law is always personalized; it is always mentioned in relation to God: i.e. the law of the Lord, the law of the Mighty One, the commands of our Creator, and so forth. So, law is never a dry, abstract concept standing by itself. Rather, it is a revelation of our loving God; it provides a sure path to lead us to knowledge of and communion with the Lord. God's commandments show us the way to life, love and joy.

So, for good reason, the first line of the first of the 150

Psalms begins with this wonderful acclamation: “**Blessed the man who follows not the counsel of the wicked...but delights in the law of the Lord.**” Mt 20:15

As I have the honor of welcoming the Catholic Medical Association members to the Diocese of Phoenix and celebrating this Eucharistic Sacrifice with you, I give thanks to God for your vocation and mission from the Lord, for your collaboration in the mission of the Church, and for your commitment and faithful witness to the Gospel of Life. The world today has great need of your witness to Christ. Thank you for living your faith and bearing witness to the Gospel, day in and day out. One important part of that witness is your obedience to the teaching of Christ and to the law of the Lord.

In this regard, it is instructive to recall that the central chapter of the Blessed John Paul II’s great encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, chapter 3, is entitled: “*You shall not kill: God’s Holy Law.*” Furthermore the chapter begins with the words of Jesus (Mt 19:7), “**If you would enter life, keep the**

commandments.”

On this day, then, when the Responsorial Psalm for our Mass is Psalm One, and the First Reading from the Prophet Malachi describes the moral and social chaos that erupts when the Law of God is not heeded, it is good for us to give thanks to God for the Ten Commandments, for the Great Commandments of Love that Jesus taught, and for His clear teaching that the way to life is to keep His commandments.

“God’s commandment is never detached from His love: it is always a gift meant for man’s growth and joy. As such, it represents an essential and indispensable aspect of the Gospel...In giving life to man, God demands that he love, respect and promote life. The gift thus becomes a commandment, and the commandment is itself a gift (E.V 52).”

To many of our contemporaries, God’s commandments sound like a loud “No” to what they think will bring them happiness. But, in fact, His law is a resounding “Yes” to life and to love. In this regard, Blessed John Paul wrote (E.V. 54), *“As explicitly formulated, the precept, ‘You shall not kill’ is*

strongly negative: it indicates the extreme limit which can never be exceeded. Implicitly, however, it encourages a positive attitude of absolute respect for life; it leads to the promotion of life and to progress along the way of a love which gives, receives and serves.”

Because God’s commandments can seem for many of our peers to be a road to sadness and a loss of freedom, how greatly is needed the joyful witness of followers of Christ like you, you who have discovered the true freedom that comes with obedience to the Lord, and thus the new and fuller life that it brings us. Psalm One describes precisely the kind of public witness that is needed today: **“Blessed the man who ...delights in the law of the Lord.”** Mt 20:15

To delight in the law of the Lord we must first delight in the Lord who gives the law; we need to rejoice in His love and take time to rest in His presence in prayer. Blessed John Paul put it this way (E.V. 83), *“Because we have been sent into the world as a ‘people for life’, our proclamation must also become a genuine celebration of the Gospel of Life. This celebration,*

with the evocative power of its gestures, symbols and rites, should become a precious and significant setting in which the beauty and grandeur of this Gospel is handed on. For this to happen, we need first of all to foster, in ourselves and in others, a contemplative outlook.”

In other words, we need to pray, to pray not just with “Hail Mary’s” repeated as we rush between one appointment and another, or “Lord, help me’s” as we are dashing down the road in the car. No, we need to set aside time for prayer, a generous portion of time each and every day.

One of our deacons often repeats this line: **UNTIL YOU REALIZE THAT PRAYER IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IN LIFE, YOU WILL NEVER HAVE TIME FOR PRAYER.**

Notice how the Lord Jesus insists on the need for prayer in our Gospel today (Lk 11:55ff), **“I tell you, ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.”**

Prayer is not magic. Our words do not control God, nor do they force Him to do something contrary to His plan. But prayer does change us, and it makes us channels of His grace. Prayer lifts us far beyond the dark world of magic, and far above our desire to be in control. Prayer brings us into loving communion with the living God. Prayer opens us to do and to be whatever His plan is for us. And His plan is always far beyond what we could ever hope for or imagine.

Pope Benedict says this about prayer (JESUS...p. 132),
“Jesus’ entire ministry arises from His prayer, and is sustained by it...Jesus...involves us in His own prayer; He leads us into the interior dialogue of triune love; He draws our human hardships deep into God’s heart”.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, especially those of you who serve the Lord and others in healthcare, let us rejoice that God has revealed to us the gift of His commandments, that He has taught us to pray, and that He has poured into our hearts the gift of His Holy Spirit.