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"The commandments are the path to freedom"

On June 20, in Saint Peter's Square, Pope Francis continued his series of addresses on the ten commandments.

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Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

This audience takes place in two places: we are here in the square, and in the Paul VI Hall there are more than 200 sick people who

follow via the maxiscreen. All together we form a community. Let us greet those in the Hall with an applause.

Last Wednesday we began a new cycle of catechesis, on the commandments. We have seen that the Lord Jesus did not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfil it. But we must understand this perspective better.

In the Bible the commandments do not exist autonomously, but are *part of a relationship*. The Lord Jesus did not come to abolish the Law, but to bring it to fulfilment. And there is that relationship, of the Covenant^[1] between God and His People. At the beginning of Chapter 20 of the Book of Exodus we read – and this is important – “And God spoke all these words” (v. 1).

It appears to be an opening like any other, but nothing in the Bible is

banal. The text does not say, “And God spoke these commandments”, but “*these words.*” The Jewish tradition always calls the Decalogue “the ten Words.” And the term “Decalogue” is intended to say precisely this. And yet they have the form of laws, they are objectively commandments. Why, then, does the holy Author use, right here, the term “ten Words”? Why? And why not “ten commandments”?

What difference is there between a *command* and a *word*? A command is essentially a communication that does not require dialogue. The word, on the other hand, is the essential means of *relations as dialogue*. God the Father creates by means of His Word, and His Son is the Word made flesh. Love is nurtured by words, like education or collaboration. Two people who do not love each other are not able to communicate. When someone speaks to our heart, our

loneliness comes to an end. A word is received, communication is given, and the commandments are words of God: God communicates Himself in these ten Words, and awaits our response.

It is one thing to receive an order, another to perceive that someone is trying to speak with us. A dialogue is much more than the communication of a truth. I can say to you: "Today is the last day of spring, it is hot for spring, but today is the last day." This is truth, it is not dialogue. But if I say to you, "What do you think of this spring?", I initiate a dialogue. The commandments are a dialogue.

Communication is carried out for the pleasure of speaking and for the real good that is communicated between those who wish each other well, by means of words. It is a good that does not consist in things, but in the same people who reciprocally give each

other in dialogue (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 142).

But this difference is not something artificial. Let us look at what happened at the beginning. The temptor, the devil, wishes to deceive the man and the woman on this point: he wants to convince them that God has forbidden them to eat the fruit of the tree of good and evil to keep them in submission. The challenge is precisely this: is the first rule that God gave to man the imposition of a despot who forbids and compels, or is it the care of a father who cares for his young and protects them from self-destruction? Is it a word or is it a command? The most tragic, among the many lies that the serpent tells Eve, is the suggestion of an envious deity: “But no, God is envious of you” – and of a possessive deity – “God does not want you to have freedom.” The facts show dramatically that the serpent

lied (cf. *Gen* 2: 16-17; 3: 4-5), he made them believe that a word of love was a command.

Man faces this crossroads: does God impose things or does He take care of me? Are His commandments just a law, or do they contain a *word*, to care for me? Is God master or father? God is the Father: never forget this. Even in the worst situations, think that we have a Father Who loves us all. Are we subjects or offspring? This conflict, within or outside us, presents itself continually: a thousand times we must choose between the mentality of slaves or the mentality of sons. The commandment is that of a master, the word is that of a Father.

The Holy Spirit is a Spirit of sons, He is the Spirit of Jesus. A spirit of slaves cannot but receive the Law in an oppressive way, and can produce two opposing results: either a life made

up of duties and obligations, or a violent reaction of rejection. All Christianity is the passage from the letter of the Law to the Spirit that gives it life (cf. 2 *Cor* 3: 6-17). Jesus is the Word of the Father, not the Father's condemnation. Jesus came to save, with His Word, not to condemn us.

We can see when a man or a woman has experienced this passage or not. People realize if a Christian reasons like a son or a slave. And we ourselves remember whether our educators took care of us like fathers or mothers, or if they simply imposed rules. The commandments are the path towards freedom, because they are the word of the Father that makes us free in this journey.

The world needs not legalism, but care. It needs Christians with the heart of sons.[2] It needs Christians

with the heart of sons: do not forget this.

[1] Chapter 20 of the Book of Exodus is preceded by the offering of the Covenant at Chapter 19, in which the following pronouncement is central: “Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (*Ex* 19,5-6). This terminology finds its emblematic synthesis in *Lev* 26,12: “I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people”, and even reaches the name foretold by the Messiah, in Isaiah 7: 14, or rather “*Immanuel*,” which is found in Matthew: “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means

‘God with us’” (*Mt* 1: 23). All this indicates the essentially relational nature of the Jewish faith and, to the highest degree, of the Christian faith.

[2] Cf John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Veritatis splendor*, 12: “The gift of the Decalogue was a promise and sign of the New Covenant, in which the law would be written in a new and definitive way upon the human heart (cf. *Jer* 31:31-34), replacing the law of sin which had disfigured that heart (cf. *Jer* 17:1). In those days, 'a new heart' would be given, for in it would dwell 'a new spirit,' the Spirit of God (cf. *Ez* 36:24-28)."
