

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Wednesday, 3rd Week of Lent; Central Catholic High School, Wheeling, WV

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Central Catholic High School

Wheeling, West Virginia

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Introduction

Imagine one day you arrived at Central Catholic High School only to find that all the rules and regulations had been abolished: no more dress codes; no standards for academic performance; no rules about personal misconduct or fair play in athletics – And suppose further your teachers and mentors said to you, we've abolished all rules and regulations because we love and respect you and think that you will grow and flourish in an atmosphere of absolute freedom.

There's something in all of us that thinks this might be a wonderful thing. Following laws, rules, and regulations sometimes seems to hem us in, to stifle our creativity, and to impose other's ideas of right conduct upon us. Rules and regulations – and structure – seem to be designed to take all the fun out of life. It's like when I go to see my doctor who tells me I should not eat anything and everything that I really like to eat. I once said to my doctor, "You don't want me to enjoy life, do you?" He replied, "I want you to live." Checkmate!

What Lawlessness Leads To

Much as we might think that a school and a society devoid of rules would be a place of freedom, peace, joy, love, and security, experience teaches us something very different. Where there are no standards of conduct and no rules of fair play; where

there is no sense that some things are right and others are wrong – when that happens people get hurt. Imagine playing football with no requirements for protective gear. Imagine basketball where no whistle is blown when one player fouls another. Imagine trying to develop your intellectual talents and creativity where there are no rules about stealing other people's work.

When we stop and think about it, rules make sense. Even when we think there are far too many rules in our lives, we realize that a life without rules and standards would be a misery. That is why we shouldn't be surprised to find Moses, the great leader of the Jewish people, celebrating the statutes and decrees that he had received from the Lord – in essence – the Ten Commandments. Even when they violated God's law, the people of Israel saw the Commandments as a great gift from God a great advantage over rival nations that did not have them.

Let's listen again to Moses' words: "For what great nation is there that has gods so close to it as the Lord our God is to us whenever we call upon him? Or what great nation has statutes and decrees that are as just as this whole law which I am setting before you today?" Moses and the people of Israel made the connection between obeying God's law and their greatness as a nation – and their greatness as individuals. Obedience to God's commandments was the key to their freedom and peace.

The Perfection of Love

All of which brings us to the Gospel where Jesus says to us: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." In Jesus' magnificent, sinless humanity, in his wisdom and love, we see what it means truly to live our lives in accord with God's commands. In his sacred humanity, Jesus shows us what it means to be truly human, to live as a person created in God's image and redeemed by his love.

That is why Jesus says to us that 'whoever obeys and teaches [God's] commandments will be called greatest in the Kingdom of heaven.' Jesus not only teaches us to obey the Commandments but he also gives us the grace, the spiritual help we need to do so. And far from stifling us, far from making us miserable, the virtuous way of life Jesus teaches us brings us joy, peace, and freedom.

This might not be easy for us to see, living as we do in a culture where freedom is defined as the ability to choose to do whatever we want so long as it's not illegal and so long as no one gets hurt. Of course, human laws don't always reflect the wisdom of God's law and when we disobey God's commands people do in fact get hurt, even if we don't fully realize the consequences of our action. That is why Pope St. John Paul II taught us that true freedom is not the ability to do whatever we want but rather the ability to do what we ought – in whatever situation we're in.

And one more thing. Breaking God's commands is not merely a matter of breaking a rule, not merely a matter of doing something 'illegal'. Breaking God's commands is an offense against God's love for us. It is a way of saying that we know better what's good for us than God does. And when we are tempted to sin, sin appears to us as something really attractive, something that will make us happy. Once we commit the sin, the illusion disappears and we realize that far from making us happy, free, and peaceful, sin makes us and many other people very unhappy and troubled.

Conclusion

At Central Catholic you have magnificent opportunities each day not only to excel in academics, technology, sports, the arts, and so much more – but also to become the human beings God intended you to be from all eternity. And we are proud of all that you accomplish and of your daily efforts to respond to the graces God gives you!

In this season of Lent, may we resolve all the more to be cleansed of sin and to live as God's sons and daughters in truth, freedom, and joy. And may God bless you and keep you always in his love!