

3rd Sunday of Lent (B)
(Exodus 20:1-17 / John 2:13-25)
08.03.2015
Creation & Dialogue

The Jewish tradition teaches that the 10 words pronounced on Mount Sinai, commonly called the 10 commandments, are closely related to the 10 words pronounced at Creation.

The link between the two events goes deeper than the fact that there are 10 words in both stories. The experience of Mount Sinai has been interpreted as a new creation, a new birth for the people of Israel. In Judaism, the Torah, given to Moses, is not only a compendium of laws and teachings. The Torah is more than that, it is a mother and it gives birth to a new humanity.

And yet rabbis have also stressed that there is a tension between Creation and Revelation. When God speaks the 10 words in the book of Genesis, there is nobody to hear or answer him, it is a monologue. On the contrary, on Mount Sinai, God is engaged in a dialogue, the 10 words are addressed to each one of us. What is translated by *you* in English is a 2nd person singular in Hebrew. God speaks to us not as a group but as individual persons.

So, between the two events, there is a kind of qualitative leap in God's relationship with his people. We move from creation to re-creation and from monologue to dialogue.

In Jesus Christ, we are no longer dealing with a qualitative leap. Jesus inaugurates the definitive new creation, and because he is the Word, the dialogue between God and humanity takes a radical new turn.

In the episode of the cleansing of the temple in Jerusalem we have just listened to, Jesus prophesies the creation of a new temple. Later on in the same Gospel, Jesus declares to the Samaritan woman: "The hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem" (Jn 4:21), announcing that there is a new temple to come.

By our baptism, being in Christ, we are the new temples of the living God.

We are made into a new creation in Jesus Christ, a new creation which brings about a new heart and a new self conformed to the Risen Lord.

The dialogue between God and humanity reaches an amazing level of proximity and intimacy. We are no longer trying to speak to a God who is far away from us, who looks down to us from on high but to a God who dwells within each one of us, his new temple. In Jesus Christ the law is no longer exterior to us, written on tablets of stone, but it is within written on our hearts.

This longing for a renewed heart is present in Judaism. Rabbi Abraham Heschel wrote: "The tablets brought down from the mountain by Moses have disappeared, but the Words have not perished. They are still here, knocking at our doors, as if pleading for them to be engraved on the tablet of our heart" (quoted in *Les dix paroles*, p. 9). This longing is fulfilled for us in Jesus Christ. St Paul tells the Corinthians that in Christ they "are a letter of Christ written not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts" (2Co 3:3). Our heart, as the seat of our deepest identity, of our intelligence and feelings has become the sanctuary where God longs to be welcomed.

The first consequence of this is that we have to be there in order to let him in. We have first to be present to ourselves. We can be so scattered and spread all over the place, rootless "like chaff before the wind" (Ps 83:13) that we have no time and energy for others.

Sometimes we can be everywhere at the same time and therefore really nowhere. So the first challenge for us is to return to ourselves, to be at home in our own skin.

The second challenge is that our hearts may be so cluttered with trivia, so encumbered with old stuff, old wounds, old stories, that the Lord may be unable to come in. He may find us so focused on politics, or money, or power, so driven by our fears that a real dialogue is impossible. Another attitude which would jeopardise the Lord's visit would be to keep him outside while we would try by our own efforts to make our hearts and our lives clean and welcoming.

There are some people who seem to be so obsessed with their own righteousness and perfection that they give the impression that they do not really need the Lord to visit them, that they are in charge of everything.

To welcome the Lord into our hearts is not a one off event, it is regularly that we have to be brought back to the place where the Lord is patiently waiting for us.

Looking at things from this point of view, we see that our Lenten observances aim at more than keeping us away from chocolates and sweet for forty days. Their goal is nothing less than to allow the Lord to restore our hearts, to re-create them. They are meant to be temples where we are invited to dialogue with our God and from where we are sent in order to relate to all our brothers and sisters in humanity.

To stand in our heart is not comparable to being confined in a small room, since our heart is supposed to be a "house of prayer for all the nations" (Mk 11:17). By ourselves, we are small and narrow, but if we trust and really believe that God is within us, then, by his grace, we find ourselves stretched over and beyond whatever we hope for or imagine. As the 2nd Vatican Council reminds us: "Nothing that is genuinely human should fail to find an echo in our hearts" (GS 1).

Let us listen to Pope Francis who asks us: "Look into the depths of your heart, look into your own inner depths and ask yourself: do you have a heart that desires something great, or a heart that has been lulled to sleep by things?" (28.08.2013, quoted in *Rejoice!*, n. 12 p. 44).