

Week 24 – Ordinary Time – September 12, 2010

The Missouri Catholic Conference is the official public policy agency for the Catholic Church in Missouri. Its board of directors is the Catholic bishops of our State. The Conference is nonpartisan. It does not endorse or oppose candidates but focuses on issues and legislation. This weekend I encourage you to join the work of the conference by signing up for it. There is no cost, but the Conference hopes you will use its action alerts and contact legislators when key votes are pending in the Missouri General Assembly or in Congress. Through the years the Conference has had many successes, such as enacting a ban on partial birth abortions, expanding health care to the poor, and a tough new law regulating triple X pornography stores. I support the Conference, and I like receiving the information I need to help shape the laws of the State of Missouri in a way that is consistent with my faith.

The link between law and faith has a long history among believers, most famously in the Ten Commandments, when God gave the chosen people a set of laws. Nobody voted on the Ten Commandments. They came directly from God, and they have inspired generations of believers ever since. We are not always faithful to the commandments, and that has been true since the day Moses received them. After sharing the commandments with the people, Moses spent some time in prayer. But when he descended the mountain, he was horrified. The people, who had just been told not to worship any false gods, had taken all their gold jewelry, tossed it into a fire, and produced a molten calf. They couldn't relate to a God they could not see, so they began worshiping a false god. Moses threw the tablets to the ground and ended up in a conversation with God that serves as our first reading today.

This conversation goes something like one between a parent and a misbehaving child. For example, a father tells his little girl that he's going away on a business trip for a couple of days. She cries. He says, "When I come home, I promise I'll take you out for ice cream." She smiles. However, while he's gone, she misbehaves at school. He gets home. "No ice cream for you," he says. She cries and says, "But you promised." The father is caught between the twin values of punishing a wrongdoer and staying faithful to promises.

That is the barrel over which Moses gets the Almighty in this conversation. God says, "Let me alone. . . that my wrath may blaze up against [the Israelites] and consume them." Moses says, "Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, and how you swore to them by your own self, saying, 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky; and all this land that I promised, I will give your descendants as their perpetual heritage.'" So because of his promise, the Lord did not so punish his people.

The parables in the gospel teach the same point: God is merciful. I mean, God really is merciful. This is not an excuse to go out and sin, but it is an excuse to come home and repent. Most people know what they've done wrong; it's no secret to them. They owe it to themselves and

the people they love to confess their sin before God, and to receive the mercy that can only come from the one who makes the laws.