

Chaplain's Bulletin February 12, 2023



Dear Folks,

There has been a lot of conversation about the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Some have even claimed that the Old Testament has a God of wrath, and the New Testament has a God of love, even though there is a good deal of love in the Old Testament and a good deal of wrath in the New Testament.

There is also paradox about the Law. Jesus says in our Gospel this Sunday, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfil (Matthew 5:17),” but the letter to the Ephesians says, “For he is our peace, he who made both one and broke down the dividing wall of enmity, through his flesh, abolishing the law with its commandments and legal claims, that he might create in himself one new person in place of two, thus establishing peace (Ephesian 2:14-16).” Does this pit the Gospels against the epistles? No. A paradox is an invitation to look deeper into the texts and the issues they are dealing with so we can have a deeper understanding.

We remember that God started with a very rough, barbaric tribe and formed them over time. We see development of thought in the Old Testament from earlier writings to the later ones. In the earlier writings, there is an emphasis on being separate from the other nations so as not to be contaminated by their evil ways and being very harsh about it. Later writings would talk about compassion for other peoples, and Mount Zion being a beacon for all the nations (See the book of Jonah, Isaiah 2, and Psalm 87).

When a plant takes root underground, it is preparing for what is to come. When it breaks out above the ground, it is not abandoning its root, but building on it. Jesus’ teaching on the Mount was built on Old Testament foundations. For example, if we read Psalm 24, we see that “Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God” was not an entirely new idea. Reading Psalm 37 we see that “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land” was also familiar.

The law says that parents are required to feed their children and are sanctioned if they neglect to do so. The parents I know, however, aren’t motivated by the law or its sanctions, but by love for their children, and it would be unthinkable not to feed them. They are beyond the law, not that they would break it, but because they are following a higher, even more demanding principle.

We remember the Old Testament and the New Testament are the work of the same God and part of the same plan of salvation. It does not represent God changing His mind, but rather Him taking us to a new level of development. We start out learning very basic principles, and expectations get greater as we grow. In Jesus, God’s plan is unveiled, and we are called to something that is humanly impossible. It is literally impossible to live the Christian life by our own power. We are completely dependent on God’s grace. We must come to Him constantly to transform us, and then it is wonderfully possible (see Matthew 19:25-26).

Blessings,

Fr. Jim