

Readings: *Exodus 20:1 – 17; Ps. 18 (19):7 – 10; 1 Corinthians 1: 22 – 25; John 2:13 – 25.*

We have already heard of the covenant made through Noah with the whole of creation, and the covenant made through Abraham with all his descendants. Today's theme is the covenant made through Moses with God's chosen people – the twelve tribes of Israel. The basis of this covenant is the declaration God makes at the beginning of today's reading: *I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.* The word 'Lord' in this declaration represents the sacred and unpronounced name of God, which is replaced in Jewish reading of the scriptures by 'Lord'. In English translations based on the King James Version this is always printed in capitals – the LORD. Greek translations of the Old Testament give us *Kyrios*, and that is the chief title given to Jesus in the New Testament (for example in Philippians 2).

After the introductory declaration the rest of the reading sets out the conditions which the LORD imposes on his people. These Ten Commandments are traditionally regarded as the foundation of Christian ethical teaching, but a brief look at any manual for penitents will show that they require much interpretation if they are to apply to us. The most obvious example is the Fourth Commandment, requiring observance of the Sabbath, that is Saturday, the last day of the week. But for Christians the Lord's Day is Sunday, the first day of the week – the day of Resurrection. Another problem is that we don't know the original meaning of some of the words: for example. the word translated 'covet' may have meant 'take possession of', and the Tenth Commandment may have forbidden the robbing of an Israelite of his 'house' – his place in the community.

These difficulties mean that we must look for the underlying purpose of the Commandments – the establishing of a relationship between the LORD and the people he has chosen as his own – rather than their historical meaning. In the Gospels Our Lord summarizes the Ten Commandments in two: *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength;* and: *you shall love your neighbour as yourself.*

From today's theme we might pick out one of the following for thought and prayer: How can I show my love for God in the way I treat fellow members of the Church? How can the Church better show that it is 'God's chosen people' – and what part should I be playing in that task?