

March 22
Dt 4:1, 5-9
MT 5:17-19

Argh! Rules, regulations, laws - why can't I just do what I want, when I want? Have you heard that before? Maybe you've said something similar at one time or another. Personally, I have a mixed record with rules. I'm the type of person who stops at every stop sign, even if I'm out in the boonies at 1 a.m. with a clear view of empty roads extending for miles. But I also get irritated with tech support people who are taught to follow a script, no matter what. "Please, sir, shut down your computer and then restart it and see if the problem goes away," they say. "I've already done that five times and the problem remains. I've also reset options and ... and ... and..." I say. "Very good sir, but please one more time," they say. "OK, just for you I've done that one more time and still have the problem," I say. "Thank you sir, now we need to reset the options," they say. Argh!

It seems to me that rules, regulations and laws fall into three categories. The first includes those that offer personal benefit. "Don't touch that stove. It's hot!" The second category helps us coexist with others. "Thou Shall Not Kill." The third I call the "some assembly required" category: "Align Part A with Part B and fasten with Bolt C and Nut D ..."

The Book of Deuteronomy, which is where today's First Reading is taken, serves as a recapitulation of God's instructions to the Hebrew people found in the earlier books of the Torah. These instructions (a.k.a. mitzvot, precepts, commandments) permitted the people to live in harmony, to maintain their culture and, most importantly, to honor the covenants made with God and so remain the chosen people. In the Gospel reading, we hear Jesus recommit his disciples to following the law. Summarized in the great commandments (love God and love neighbor), we find in God's law what we need for our personal benefit and what we need to live well in community. Our lives are not complete. We're a work in progress. Some (more) assembly required. The instructions we receive in the commandments, taught in Christ's words and example, ensure that all the pieces will fit.

Reflection questions:

- 1) When I hear the word "law," what are my first thoughts?
- 2) How do I view the commandments? As God bossing me around? As rules that must not be violated under penalty of damnation? As instructions to guide us to lives of harmony with God and others? As something else?
- 3) How can I use God's "law" to grow into a better disciple this Lent?

Reflection by Deacon Bill Hathaway, St. Edward, Lowell.