

FROM THE PASTOR

Dear Brothers and Sisters



“I tell you solemnly, till heaven and earth disappear, not one dot, not one little stroke, shall disappear from the Law until its purpose is achieved.”
Matt 5, 18

What Law is Jesus referring to? Federal Law, state law, traffic law, health care law? He is referring not to any human prescript, but to the Law of Moses, i.e. the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, otherwise known as the Torah.

The Law of Moses is written down, and as such it is made up of words – strokes of writing, letters on a page. The original text is Hebrew, which none of us here at Our Lady Mother of the Church are able to read. But thanks to St. Jerome, who went to live in the Holy Land, residing in Bethlehem, and who gave his life to learn the Hebrew language, the Law of Moses was translated into Latin. From the Latin we have the vernacular translations, including ours in English.

The full meaning of Jesus words quoted above can be lost on us English speakers, because we are unable to read Hebrew – the original text. The words “Not one dot, not one little stroke” do not mean much to us, but they would have meant something very specific for Jesus listeners. In Hebrew there is one letter which is smaller than all the others. Unlike the English language, where all the letters are the same size, the Hebrew language has the ‘yod,’ the smallest letter in the alphabet. In English we are taught from grade school how to write our letters on a horizontal line, our letters sit on this line and extend from it upwards. In Hebrew there is no line on the page, letters are formed from the top down, they are aligned from above, thanks to the yod, which is suspended above.

It is the yod to which Jesus refers when he says ‘not one dot, not one little stroke.’

The yod is the tenth letter of the alphabet, and its presence or absence changes the tense from past to future. If no yod is present the tense is perfect – past. If the yod is present the tense becomes imperfect – the future, that which is to come, that which is open. Because of this the yod is also the first letter in the name of God – Yahweh. Every time the yod is written/ pronounced, the name of God is invoked.

This yod is written only once in the Law of Moses as a capital letter, in a text of the Book of Numbers. This occurs when the people of God (us) were complaining and being obstinate, refusing to listen to Moses or to believe what God was telling them. Finally God got fed up and decided to forsake this people, and choose another who would obey him and listen to him. It is then that Moses intercedes and asks God not to do this, but rather to let his power grow (Yigdal) by displaying his mercy and patience. God listens and relents, he is merciful, and Moses says: “Yahweh is slow to anger and rich in graciousness, forgiving faults and transgression...” Numbers 14, 18

The heart of the Law, the center of all the precepts given in the Scriptures, the essence of the commandments, is this mercy and forgiveness. God’s name is made great, his true power is manifest in his capacity to forgive, in his willingness to be merciful.

How many times has he been merciful to us, we who are often stiff necked and obstinate. He has not acted according to what we deserve, but out of his patience and mercy. This is the heart of the law. Having experienced the mercy of God, may we be merciful to others. There are times when we have had enough, when we get fed up, when we went to take matters into our own hands. People can be unreasonable, they can push our buttons, and drive us nuts. It is then that the yod comes to our salvation.

It helps us not to forget who we are, and to remember who God is.

We are invited to be aligned not to what is below, but to what is above.

We are invited not to dwell on the past, but to look to the open future, the eternal life to which we have been called.

May the heart of the law find a home in our hearts today.

Fr. Sean