

3rd Sunday of Lent

Cycle B

March 11, 2012 7:30 and 9 am
Saint Margaret Parish, Bel Air

Artistic Minimalism

The term minimalism – minimalism – describes a certain kind of art.

My understanding is that minimalism began as an artistic movement in the 1960s. Minimalist painters depict an object – like an apple – in the starkest possible way.

Minimalists would paint a few dots of the color red, some rounded lines and some of the shape of an apple. But they would not represent the apple itself.

They depict only the bare essentials of the object. There is no feeling, no spirit, and no personal dimension in the painting.

Obviously, this style of painting is very abstract. It reduces art to a minimum, and that is why it is called minimalism.

Religious Minimalism

Today's Scripture passages address the issue of religious minimalism.

The Old Testament passage gives us something very familiar – the Ten Commandments. These commandments have formed the foundation of Judeo-Christian morality for the past 3,000 years.

They are important and we need to respect them. At the same time, these commandments are minimalist.

Notice in today's gospel that Jesus is dealing with some people who are religious minimalists. No question, they are obeying the basic law of keeping the Sabbath holy.

These vendors are in the temple and are also helping others to keep the Sabbath. But they are doing this for exorbitant, unjust prices.

Jesus gets angry and drives them out of the temple. Why?

Because they are religious minimalists. They are obeying the commandment as it is written, but they have not embraced what it is really all about.

Like minimalist painters, they are keeping the law in its bare-bones, starkest form, but they have not put their spirit or heart into it. Jesus deplores these religious minimalists and calls us to much more.

Religious Maximalism

In fact, Jesus calls us to a religious maximalism.

Jesus wants us, for example, to look at the Ten Commandments and put our heart into them. He wants us to embrace the spirit of what God is telling us to do.

Jesus wants us to do as much good as possible. And he wants us to avoid as much evil as possible.

Jesus calls us to a religious or spiritual maximalism. Let's look at just three of the commandments and see how this plays out.

Three Commandments

The commandment says: *"Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day."* The minimalist approach says: I come to Mass every Sunday.

The maximalist approach says: I come to Mass and really try to put myself into it – joining in the prayers, seeing the hymns as prayers and trying to sing them, listening and taking in what the readings are saying. And: I also try to pray in some way every day and make every day holy.

Then the commandment says: *"You shall not commit adultery."* The minimalist approach says: I have not been unfaithful to my wife or my husband.

The maximalist approach says: I am committed not to place before my eyes anything that would compromise even my inner faithfulness to my wife or husband. And: I try to make time for communication: sharing what's going on with me and listening to what's going on with my spouse as a way to deepen our intimacy.

And then the commandment says: *"You shall not covet your neighbor's house, nor anything else that belongs to him."* The minimalist approach says: I have not stolen anything and I keep in check any feelings of envy.

The maximalist approach says: I try to be mindful of the three billion people on this earth living on \$2 a day or less and lacking the basics of human life. And so, I try not to use more food, water, electricity, oil and natural gas than I need.

Conclusion

So, religious or spiritual minimalism and maximalism – the Scriptures give us quite a Lenten challenge today!