

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

Not the Center, Not a Pawn Third Week in Lent Wednesday, March 11, 2015
8:15 AM **Dt 4:1, 5-9; Mt 5:17-19** (You are a being beloved of God, created by God,
and connected to God, but free.)

“For what great nation is there that has God so close to it as the Lord, our God, is to us whenever we call upon him?”

This expresses something quite unique to the understanding of life that comes from the Hebrew, Israelite, Jewish point of view. It is unique. God is close whenever we call upon him. That is something precious. St. Paul improved on this when he said, **“In God we live and move and have our being.”** Not only is God close, but actually we are in God and don't exist apart from God. The prologue of John's Gospel says, **“Apart from the Word nothing came to be.”** Like St. Paul, this is talking about not only is God close, but actually we can't be apart from God, impossible, metaphysically impossible. **We are in God.** We don't exist apart from God, nothing does, no one does. **That is basically the truth revealed to us.**

Now ordinary human minds don't come to that by themselves. And we can see historically two extremes. In the world before Jesus, **in the ancient world**, the setup was this: **one man would be close to God**, whatever you want to call him: pharaoh, king, emperor, ensi, whatever word you give, one, only one is close to God. Everybody else is a pawn. And **then there are some intermediaries** called warriors and priests. **In the modern world everybody is a god unto himself.** That is what the Enlightenment actually told people. Look, the Church is the enemy. It's saying you are just a little part of a bigger whole. Oh, no, you are not, you are everything. You are the center of everything; everything revolves around you. This is individualism. This is Modernism, **and it's killing us**, by the way.

So it is very relevant how we look at things. **The whole idea of the Law is, look, you are not the center of everything, but you are not a pawn either. You are a being beloved of God, created by God, and connected to God, but free.** That's the big thing—but free! That's what the Old Testament made very clear. You are free. Here is a law. I want you to follow this deliberately, consciously, as a response to my love for you. But **I'm not going to force you to do it, but if you don't, there will be consequences.** I can't help that. Why? Because the world is all one fabric. The universe is all one fabric. You start fooling around, you are going to have consequences. One thing leads to another. Every action produces a reaction. Sooner or later your choices will have an effect, and it will eventually get back to you. Everything that comes around goes around. Those sayings are all valid. They are true. They say something about life in a general way. So that's what the Old Testament tried to explain. You are not a pawn. You really do matter. But on the other hand you are not the center of reality either and you can't live that way. **This is what the Law is going to teach you: how to observe boundaries, how to honor other people, how to act like a member of the whole, not just the whole itself, how to be a neighbor, how to be a friend, how to live.** That's the whole idea of the Law.

Jesus says in today's gospel, it's all being fulfilled in me. He actually didn't say it in those words, but he is getting at that, that the Law is coming now to fulfillment. He is **showing us the way for the consummation of all God's purposes,** and he will consummate it in a very unique way by the total offering of himself to God. And **we can participate in that in our own way. But it has to be conscious. It has to be deliberate, and it has to be freely done. God does not want to force anyone, and will not force anyone to obey him or to follow him, or for that matter, to seek him.** That's all up to us.