

## **Jesus, fullness of the Law, source and finality of all moral judgment**

*Our reflection for the third week of Lent is written by Fr Désiré Yamuremye SJ, director of Service Yezu Mwiza (SYM), a program that offers comprehensive HIV and AIDS care and prevention services.*

In today's readings, there is a word that crops up repeatedly: signs. I don't propose to go into anthropological explanations to better understand this concept here, but we know that our entire lives are made up of signs, of symbols. In the Gospel, John tells us about Jesus who gets angry with the vendors who decided not to respect the Temple, which is the symbol *par excellence* of the Covenant between God and the people of Israel.

In fact, as the people redeemed by God moved with the times, the sense of the History in which God played a role gradually disappeared. This same people consequently wanted to build their own society, their country, without the values contained in the Ten Commandments and the other precepts that God gave His people so that they could live well and better. There was no end to the violations of the commandments, which are also signs of the Covenant between God and His people, given through the intermediary Moses. The temple was no longer the symbol that stood for God. The temple was adored for itself and not for what it symbolised, that is the Covenant sealed between God and His people. With the erosion of time, the chosen people fell into idolatry, and not only of the signs of the covenant; they also went to the extent of inventing other idols.

We know how, in the history of salvation, the commandments mentioned in the first reading were manipulated by the Pharisees and experts of the law. The interpretation of all these laws, which God had prescribed through Moses, had become a business racket to advance the social as well as financial standing of the experts. It is in this context that Jesus reacts vigorously to the manipulation of the law and takes advantage of the occasion to announce the principle and foundation of the second Covenant with all the people.

The second Covenant, without removing the ancient Covenant, gives it another meaning. This is what creates confusion when those whom the evangelist John calls Jews ask Jesus: "What sign can you show us for doing this?" (Jn 2:18) The new Covenant is centred on the

love of which Jesus is a model par excellence. He gives his life, his body and his blood to build his Church, the body of which he is the head.

This Church lives from faith, hope and charity. How then to build a Church that has AIDS? Oh what a scandal for those who would want a Church that is extremely pure, without stain!!! The Church has AIDS? With faith and conviction, I say yes. In sharing the body and blood of Christ, we become what we receive: the Body of Christ. We have no moral judgment to bring to anyone who is wounded. People who are wounded need healing. As Pope Francis said so well, the Church should be like a field hospital that welcomes with compassion all those who suffer and, I would add, all those who suffer because of HIV and AIDS.

There is no moral scandal – unless one wants to be like the Pharisees and other teachers of the law in Jesus' time of Jesus – in welcoming sex workers, and other groups at high risk of HIV infection, to our centres of care and treatment. There is no scandal in accompanying them with compassion and love. Today, let us ask the Lord to heal us from the disease of legalism and moralism before the suffering of the People of God that is due to HIV and AIDS. Let us encourage those affected to develop the virtues of faith, hope and charity, which are easily lost in the face of the suffering caused by HIV. Amen.