

Homily. 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time. Year. B. 31/8-1/9/2024.

Laws and rituals, rules and regulations; these can be a great friend and help to us when they serve our needs. However, they become a hard taskmaster and enemy to us when we end up having to serving them. This was the situation Jesus challenged in St. Mark's gospel and in the other gospels, too.

The laws and practices God gave were meant to serve God's people in their daily lives, relationships and worship. Over many centuries these laws and rules, imposed on every aspect of living, became an end in themselves, a burden too great for ordinary people to apply and obey. Only the 'professional' religious and social elite could manage to keep them and from their position of superiority they looked down on others.

I've seen this in our times too; Priests and people bent sideways by scrupulosity; others so obsessed with set rituals, prayers and practices that they've long forgotten the purpose of what they're doing. An law abiding Jew today has to have 2 kitchens, 2 sets of cooking and serving implements, cutlery and plates to follow all of the purity laws and rules. Realistically, for people working six days a week to keep a roof over their heads and food on the table such demands are unattainable, a form of slavery impossible to endure now, as back when Jesus spoke. And what's all of this about? What's it for? We'll, the easing of our fears of course; the serving and worshipping of laws and rules in order to make us feel safe; a magic of rituals and regulations giving the appearance of security very far from their God intended purpose of helping us be holy and true.

St. James says that all that is good and perfect comes down to us from God above, the Father of Light. He goes on to urge us to not only listen to the word of God but to do what it says; helping the lonely and abandoned. In John's gospel Jesus says that the kind of worship God wants is giving oneself to God in spirit and in truth in the service others. Different words, but the same message, a message lost and long forgotten by the scribes and Pharisees that Jesus was dealing with. They offered empty lip service Jesus said, because their hearts were far from God, being fixated on law compliance, their status and personal security and not on faith in God.

Speaking to the people who were watching and listening to all of this Jesus said that it's not what goes into us but what comes out of us, out of our hearts and inner selves, that makes us 'unclean' before God. We might, even with difficulty, manage to control what enters our mouths and bodies but what comes out of our souls is much harder altogether. In dealing this we are responsible, needing to fall back faithfully into the arms of God's mercy, or fall face first into our personal guilt and denial.

I'll end with the great wisdom of our faith, sung every Easter Vigil in the Exsultet, then sadly too quickly forgotten. This great joyous song of praise and exultation has the following lines; Hear them, think on them and be a little shaken; O wonder of your humble care for us! O love, o charity beyond all telling, to ransom a slave you gave away your Son! O truly necessary sin of Adam, destroyed completely by the the death of Christ. O happy fault of Adam that merited for us so great, so glorious a Redeemer. For without faults, who needs a merciful Saviour? And without sins, there's really no point at all in the gift of a merciful Redeemer.

