

RULES AND REGULATIONS



“Charity is certainly greater than any rule. Moreover, all rules must lead to charity.” - St. Vincent de Paul

Rules and regulations; written and unwritten. It seems as if life is full of rules and regulations: no food-contaminated cartons in the recycle bin; hands-free cellphone use only while driving; keep your dog on a leash. These examples are appropriate to manage behaviors that lead to damage, threat or costly inconvenience.

Do some rules seem silly? While, what about the old rule that women couldn't vote; don't end a sentence with a preposition; the knife and spoon are placed on the right-hand side of the plate.

Can rules be broken for other, more immediate considerations: Emergency: stop at a red light until it turns green ... unless it's 2:00 in the morning, the roads are empty, and your wife is in labor; Immorality: Blacks can't eat here?

In Mark's Gospel, “some of the disciples ate their meals with unclean, that is, unwashed, hands.” That was a violation of a Jewish tradition.

The Pharisees followed the law but not its essence. Is the essence of Catholic rules and regulations to follow rules such as faithfully attending Sunday mass and on Monday cheating in your business dealings?

Or is the essence to attend mass through which we worship God in community are fed through the Eucharist and what God teaches us, and finally as we go and proclaim the Gospel with our lives?

Moses gave his people 613 statutes and decrees. That may seem like a lot.

Yet, the statutes and decrees were not the point. The purpose of these was that the Israelites had guidance to live and enter the land which the LORD gave them. Live in relationship with God and enter into God's kingdom in heaven.

Can we understand that living in relationship with God means more than paying lip service to and obeying every rule while missing the essence?

That is, as James writes, to “be doers of the word and not hearers only, deluding yourselves.” For James explains that being doers of the Gospel teachings is “to care for orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained by the world.”

Living with God naturally leads one to “live by the rules” – especially the rule of charity. Living by the rules period is not the point; the intent is to build God's kingdom of heaven here on earth – charity – a responsibility for which God's rules provide necessary guidance.

The Responsorial Psalm reminds us of this, “One who does justice will live in the presence of the Lord. Whoever walks blamelessly and does justice; who thinks the truth in his heart and slanders not with his tongue.”

(Sunday Readings for August 30, 2015)



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