

## August 29, 2021

Dt 4:1-2,6-8; Jas 1:17-18,21b-22,27; Mk 7:1-8,14-15,21-23

In the first, reading Moses is instructing the people on the law of God. He promises that to follow the law of the Lord will bring prosperity: *Now, Israel, hear the statutes and decrees which I am teaching you to observe, that you may live, and may enter in and take possession of the land which the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you.* On that day he was speaking to them of taking possession of the promised land, but this is a prefiguring of us being told what must be done to gain eternal life and take possession of our place in the Kingdom of Heaven. The laws of the Lord are not just political regulations for a society, as Our Lord says: *The words I speak to you are spirit and life.* Following these laws not only promotes peace on the Earth, and justice for those who are oppressed - but they are essential for us remaining within the Body of Christ. It is by remaining in that sinless Body that we can take possession of our inherited kingdom in heaven when Jesus receives it from the Father. Outside His Body we cannot be with God in heaven - despite the false notion (which contradicts what Jesus says) that everyone automatically goes to heaven. You can do whatever you decide and go to heaven is perhaps something that takes away anxiety, but it is not true according to Jesus. This is important stuff.

The people of Jesus' time also placed an importance on following God's Law - as we all should. There is an important difference between human rules and God's rules. Human rules are often made based upon biases and with specific goals in mind that benefit a specific group. They are made by humans, and so, like humans, can be mistaken. God's law is different - it comes from the all-knowing, all-wise, all-perfect God. If it doesn't look right to us, then the problem is not with the law. Yet we have distorted thinking that tell us that it's ok to follow your own feelings even if that is not what God has said, that you can take whatever meaning God's law that make you feel better, that tell us that if we don't agree with any thing it must not be right. We think we can each individual can decide for themselves what God's law is saying. Not so.

Moses goes on to say in our passage: *In your observance of the commandments of the LORD, your God, which I enjoin upon you, you shall not add to what I command you nor subtract from it.* The big problem in the Gospel we heard today was that the Pharisees were promoting many human-made rules alongside God's laws as if they had the same weight. They had added hundreds of rules that were not actually in the Law. They had lost the true reasons for

these religious rules and rituals, and were using them as means to bring down others who did not measure up to their standards. The rules had just become rules to follow to be a good person, rules that proved you are better and more religious - they lost the fact that these practices, like our religious practices, were meant to bring the individual closer to God, not separate and divide the community.

Sometimes people misunderstand and misapply Church regulations as a means of separation and division or a reason to look down on others (just like the Pharisees did). Other times, people are overly faithful to earthly and secular standards that they think can trump God's law (e.g. well the Supreme Court says abortion is OK that makes taking an innocent life in this case my choice). God's law is the first thing, and the Church was given the ability by Jesus to develop applications of these laws for the current times and make the judgement calls amid various groups that all think they are right. As Jesus said to the Apostles: *Whatever you declare bound on Earth is bound in heaven, whatever you declare loosed on earth is loosed in heaven.* We know that the Holy Spirit is ultimately guiding that process in which the Spirit brings unity by fidelity to God's one truth, and not a personal and biased interpretation that is tied to one set of people or time.

We as Catholics realize that the outside culture is not the thing that tells us how to apply God's law. We know that the truth is found in a thousands of years of Tradition applying the Scriptures and searching for the truth - were not talking about human traditions like those of the Pharisees, but capitol T Tradition - coming down from God through the centuries. We don't just change the applications of Divine Law day in and day out to match some shifting outside standard or to win favor, or to swell the ranks, or to market ourself to the populace - Jesus certainly didn't do that - He stuck to the truth, gave applications of the law that were consistent with their underlying meaning, and the truthful understandings that came before and were inspired by the Spirit - He more often told people what they didn't want to hear - the truth is not always what you want to hear, but it is, the truth. We must remain faithful to the truth of God and not try to find ways to bend it into what we think sounds better, gets us off the hook, validates what we want to do (or don't want to do), or appeals to the populace, or makes us look more "woke" or relevant. The path to salvation in Jesus Christ is found in Jesus Christ, not in those who deny His relevance, or those who try to shape His message to fit their own tastes. It is found in those who have the courage to have faith in what Jesus has said and follow in love.