

## 22nd Sunday (B)

- How wrong, how distorted religion can become - & this includes our own Catholic Christian religion.
- From all the way back in the time of Jesus, even to today, the tendency has been to make religion merely a matter of measurable external practices.
- It's even manifested in the way we speak, when for example, we refer to someone as a practising Catholic, or we can say of another that he or she does not practise their faith.
- In this way we can determine that someone adheres or not, to a system of religious laws, rules, observances, doctrines & dogmas - & all this imposed by law, under the pain of penalties.
- Laws are laid down & people are measured accordingly.
- And our ultimate salvation is determined by the rules that if we obey, we are good & are saved & if we disobey, we are bad & therefore lost.
- This is exactly what happened in today's Gospel when the Pharisees & the experts in the law criticised the disciples of Jesus for not observing the laws of purification.
- They were scrupulous observers of their traditions who blindly resist the newness that Jesus, the prophet of love, wants to introduce into their lives.
- The experts in the law were indignant when they saw the disciples eat with ritually unclean hands – they weren't concerned about hygiene but religious law.
- To them, Jesus & his disciples were breaking down that blind obedience to traditions while he was creating around himself a space for freedom where what matters is our capacity to love.
- For all their awareness of what Jesus was teaching, these experts in the law hadn't understood anything about the Kingdom of God that Jesus is announcing - God doesn't reign in their hearts.
- The Law, their traditional rules, rituals & customs are more important than looking to the good of people.
- They don't care to seek the kingdom of God & his justice.
- Of course we need laws to uphold justice & protect the vulnerable, but throughout history the experts in the law can interpret them narrowly with rigid legalism that they achieve the opposite of what they are set out to do.
- This is what angers Jesus because they confuse the will of God with what is a product of human invention – even if they are about honouring God.
- What God wants most of all is to be in a loving relationship with us.
- That is the one & only reason He created us in the first place - to share His love with us & for us to generate that love – we have a divine capacity to do this because we are made in the image of God who is love.

- When it comes to relationships, behaviour is important, of course, but the motivations of the mind & the heart are just as important because it is from there that our behaviour stems - God does not want us to be obedient but resentful servants; He wants us to be lovers.
- He wants what is best for us: to be in loving relationships, first with Him & then with our fellow human beings.
- God desires that we know ourselves & be honest with ourselves.
- The way we look at the evil in our lives & the world also affects our compassion, because if we're not in touch with the greed that leads to theft, the anger that leads to murder, the desire for power that leads to rape, or the alienation that leads to terrorism, then it's hard for us to recognise those feelings in ourselves let alone to be compassionate toward the perpetrators of these evil acts.
- The degree to which we know what our hearts are capable of leads us to be grateful for the graces we receive & cultivate, & to be compassionate toward those who have missed out on this good news & who, by nurture or free will, have chosen evil as their fundamental option.
- Jesus goes right to the heart.
- It's not the rules he is interested in but the truth.
- What he wants is not our observance but our love.
- He turns everything on its head & tells the Pharisees that it's the attitude that counts - not what goes in but what comes out of a person that causes either defilement or holiness.
- Jesus is talking about the heart as the place where the truth of who we are is; it is not so much *what you do* as *what you are*, or *who you are*.
- In our human ignorance & weakness we have made law & morality the same thing.
- If something is according to the law, then it is good & moral; if it's not according to the law it is bad & immoral, but Jesus teaches us that this is wrong.
- He himself often broke & transcended the law in the interest of compassion for others & in so doing he taught that neither the law of the land or the law of the church is absolute – only the law of God is absolute, & Jesus reduced that law to the love of God & neighbour according to how our conscience, led by God directs us.
- What should concern us as a Church is not to preserve the past intact, as the Pharisees did, but to make possible the birth of a Church & of Christian communities able to reproduce the Gospel faithfully & to make the Kingdom of God a reality in our own time & place – in our society.
- Our main responsibility is not to repeat the past, but to make possible in our time for people to encounter the living Christ without hiding or obscuring him with human traditions, however sacred they may seem.