

## SEPTEMBER 2, 2018

Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading 1 [DT 4:1-2, 6-8](#)

Responsorial Psalm [PS 15:2-3, 3-4, 4-5](#)

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R. (1a) **The one who does justice will live in the presence of the Lord.**

Reading 2 [JAS 1:17-18, 21B-22, 27](#)

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Gospel [MK 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23](#)

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When the Pharisees with some scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus, they observed that some of his disciples ate their meals with unclean, that is, unwashed, hands. —For the Pharisees and, in fact, all Jews, do not eat without carefully washing their hands, keeping the tradition of the elders. And on coming from the marketplace they do not eat without purifying themselves. And there are many other things that they have traditionally observed, the purification of cups and jugs and kettles and beds. —So the Pharisees and scribes questioned him, "Why do your disciples not follow the tradition of the elders but instead eat a meal with unclean hands?" He responded, "Well did Isaiah prophesy about you hypocrites, as it is written: *This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines human precepts.* You disregard God's commandment but cling to human tradition." He summoned the crowd again and said to them, "Hear me, all of you, and understand. Nothing that enters one from outside can defile that person; but the things that come out from within are what defile. "From within people, from their hearts, come evil thoughts, unchastity, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, folly. All these evils come from within and they defile."

### HOMILY:

A man drove downtown to pick up a few quick items in a grocery store. He parked near the store and raced inside for a quick few items. It only took about 5 minutes to shop, and when he came out there was a motorcycle cop writing *a parking ticket*. He went up to him and said, 'Come on buddy, how about giving a guy a break?' The policeman ignored him and continued writing the ticket. When he reminded the cop that there were much more serious crimes to be worried about than some expired meter, he glared at him and started writing *another ticket* for having bald tires!! When he "congratulated" him on progress towards his monthly quota of tickets, the officer finished the second ticket and put it on the car with the first. Then he started writing *a third ticket* for a broken tail light!! When in desperation, he repeated, "why can't you give a guy a break?", the officer replied, "You keep this up, I'll have this car of yours impounded." The man replied, "My car? I parked around the corner!"

The "attitude" of this man towards the officer is evidence the love-hate relationship we Americans have with the law. Indeed, we are a nation of laws. For example, in that most American genre of movies, "the western," we like it when the lawlessness of the West is defeated when the Calvary comes to the rescue. To be a country where all can live in peace, we know we need the law. On the other hand, we have a deep libertarian streak, which has us demanding the right and freedom to do what we want in this "land of the free and the home of the brave." At the same time that, in justice, we want to see a police officer stop a reckless driver, we'd just as soon hope not to see that same police officer when we're behind the wheel. But this ambivalence towards the law is nothing new. Each age has the same love-hate attitude

toward the law. The human being, created to live with others, knows that without some norms in community, chaos can result and security is imperiled. At the same time, our free will wants to limit the control of that same community and its laws, so we can choose to do what we feel is best.

We see the two ends of the spectrum regarding our attitudes towards law on display in the scriptures today: **On the one hand**, the scriptures praise and even take joy in the law. In the first reading, from the Book of Deuteronomy, the people of Israel, our religious ancestors, praise their nation specifically because it is a nation of God-given laws, divine guidance on how they are to live. Moses speaks for the people when he says, "What great nation has statutes and decrees that are as just as this whole law which I am setting before you today?" We know that with no order in society, insecurity and chaos result, for our human condition tends to misuse of our freedom if there are no limits on it. Nor can we manage our individual lives without some principles of goodness and fairness to direct us.

**On the other hand**, Jesus recognizes that the sheer multiplication of laws can render us enslaved and lacking in the freedom of the children of God, represented by the demands of the Pharisees. When they question Jesus, "Why do your disciples not follow the tradition of the elders but instead eat a meal with unclean hands?", Jesus replies to them, "You disregard God's commandment but cling to human tradition." Their observance of law has become a thing unto itself, has left them lacking in charity, and rendered them far from God's plans. We need laws to live in freedom from chaos, but we know that excessive laws can too enslave us.

How do we find the middle road in each of our lives and across the contours of each of our hearts between our need for the law and our aversion to an excessive focus on law that limits our freedom? St. Paul, that great legal mind of our earliest Christian tradition speaks to this when he says in his Letter to the Romans, "Whatever . . . commandment there may be, [is] summed up in this saying, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no evil to the neighbor; hence, love is the fulfillment of the law" (Rom. 13:9-10).

In the end, then, we know we cannot live without laws to govern our behaviors, nor can we live freely when law becomes excessive and overly burdensome. The middle road is to measure each action in our lives with the question, "Is this a truly loving act, or am I harming another or merely serving myself?" **LOVE: when our actions will the good of others.** May the Holy Spirit, who comes to us fully in the Eucharist, teach us now the true law of love, patterned after the example of Jesus and the saints, that we might live life to its fullest. It is for this happiness we were created: the law of love.