



Bringing Home the Word

Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)
August 29, 2021

Human Rules and God’s Rule

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

The Old Testament tells of a golden calf, produced by the Israelites when Moses disappeared up the mountain to receive God’s law (see Exodus 32). Since Moses delayed, they melted gold brought from Egypt, made their own god, and began worshipping it. This is the essence of idolatry: We create a god to worship, but since it is our creation, we are really worshipping ourselves.

Jesus accused the Pharisees of falling into a similar trap. They slavishly revered human traditions that didn’t reflect the heart of God. They hid behind laws created in the name of religion to serve themselves and their desire for power.

Jesus overturns the tables of their self-justifications. He quotes the prophet as an accusation: “This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me” (Mark 7:6).

Before pointing an accusatory finger, realize that the same can happen to us. We can cling to human traditions and laws while disregarding God’s basic commands of love and mercy. We can hide behind those laws and traditions to justify our self-righteousness and look down on others who are not as pious as us, as noted by James: “Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deluding yourselves” (James 1:22).

Pope Francis makes a special effort to remind the Church, especially the clergy, of this truth: “Dangerous as it was then for the Pharisees, so too is it for us to consider ourselves acceptable, or even worse, better than others simply for observing the rules...even though we do not love our neighbor, we are hard of heart, we are arrogant and proud.” +

Sunday Readings

Deuteronomy 4:1–2, 6–8

What great nation has statutes and ordinances that are as just as this whole law which I am setting before you today?

James 1:17–18, 21b–22, 27

Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deluding yourselves.

Mark 7:1–8, 14–15, 21–23

[Jesus said,] “You disregard God’s commandment but cling to human tradition.”

We can hide behind laws and traditions to justify our self-righteousness and look down on others.

A Word from Pope Francis

Let us try asking ourselves: Am I open to the action of the Holy Spirit?...This is a prayer we must pray every day: “Holy Spirit, make my heart open to the word of God, make my heart open to goodness, make my heart open to the beauty of God every day.”

—General audience, May 15, 2013



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Do I look down on others who are not as generous and faithful as I?
- Is there a subtle division in my heart between those who deserve my love and those who do not?

A Profound Connection

By Kathleen M. Basi

I was young when my great-grandparents passed away. I remember being afraid of them. I was intimidated by their vast age and had difficulty communicating with them.

So, it has been a beautiful thing for me to see my children developing relationships with their great-grandmothers—relationships that cross the boundaries of this world. They prayed for my grandmother before she died, and they pray for her now, two years after her death.

In a world that depends on the tangible and measurable, even people of faith sometimes shy away from praying for the dead. What, really, is the point? They're dead! Yet popular inspirational culture is peppered with stories of people who sense that their loved ones are still with them.

As Catholics, we have inherited a beautifully holistic approach to death and resurrection. Believing in eternal life means those we love are dead only in the body. They're still able to care about us... and it is still worth praying for them.

Our Catholic faith also gives us a realistic perspective on holiness. We know how few of us are really worthy of the kingdom when we die—yet we also believe that God is too merciful to condemn us for all eternity. Just as we prayed for those we love in life, so we pray for them in death.

Even more beautifully, we can ask them to pray for us. That's a pretty



wonderful thing. Those who formed us in faith—not only family members but also teachers and mentors—are still in our lives. We talk a lot about the role of saints as inspiration for daily living, but it's those we knew in person who influence us most. We find ourselves repeating our fathers' wisdom, our mothers' mannerisms, and pondering the life philosophy of the grandmother whose sugar jar we dip into while making cookies.

I'm not saying anything new here, but it bears repeating. Catholics may not suffer from overt discrimination these days, but we are still very aware of the ways in which our beliefs don't quite jibe with those of the broader Christian

culture. We can be hesitant to embrace the profound connection between us and the communion of saints—both the big “S” and the little “s” varieties.

Today is as good a time as any to reconnect with those who have gone before—to remember what they taught us, to imagine them standing by our side at our toughest moments, whispering the advice we treasured (or perhaps didn't treasure enough) when they were here in the flesh. This month, try to remember—and we will be better Christians because of it. +

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PRAYER

Lord, you come from the heart of the Trinity. Give me a pure heart, that I may reflect goodness and love.

—From *Faithful Meditations for Every Day in Ordinary Time*, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

August 30–
September 4

Monday, Weekday:
1 Thes 4:13–18 / Lk 4:16–30

Tuesday, Weekday:
1 Thes 5:1–6, 9–11 / Lk 4:31–37

Wednesday, Weekday:
Col 1:1–8 / Lk 4:38–44

Thursday, Weekday:
Col 1:9–14 / Lk 5:1–11

Friday, St. Gregory the Great:
Col 1:15–20 / Lk 5:33–39

Saturday, Weekday:
Col 1:21–23 / Lk 6:1–5

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