

Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, Oct 15th 2014

Is Jesus upset or what? In today's Gospel (Lk 11:42-46), Jesus denounces the Pharisees and scribes for being so blindly committed to following the Jewish law. He uses "Woe to you" to the Pharisees three times in this short passage from Luke and then goes after the scribes with a woe of their own.

Why is Jesus so upset? If you take a look at the passage right before today's Gospel, Luke 11:37-41, Jesus was invited to join a Pharisee for dinner and was rebuked by the Pharisee because Jesus had not ritually cleansed Himself before the meal. It is at that moment, that Jesus hits a boiling point. He refers to the Pharisees as "You fools" (Lk 11:40).

One point that Jesus is trying to make with the Pharisees and scribes is, don't be tyrannized by the law and don't tyrannize others through the law. Yes, it is important to have clean hands before a meal, but it is unlikely that God will be upset with a little dirt under your nails. More to the point of today's Gospel is that loving God, others and yourself; caring for the poor; and living a faith that promotes justice is the message of Jesus. Laws are important, but all laws should help us to live in the Spirit of Christ.

Jesus is the one to follow. However, we have in the Church so many who have gone before us and who are with us today as models to follow. Let me offer two very different examples. Today, we celebrate the feast of St. Teresa of Jesus (Avila) who lived from 1515-1582. She was a Carmelite who left her convent to find a new convent. Her previous convent was lax in regard to the cloister, so she established a new convent with many rules, but all of which led members of the community to a deeper level of the contemplative life. Although it seems ironic, in this case these rules led her and others to a greater freedom in loving Jesus more.

The other example is Pope Francis. He is not claiming that we need to be perfect to be in the Church, since the Church, as he has said, is for sinners. As Jesus did, Francis does: calls us to be loving, forgiving people who are attentive to others, especially the poor. That is to follow the way of Jesus.

Today, I would ask you to consider what gets in your way of being more loving and what might you put in the way of others that may prevent them from loving God, themselves and others more fully.

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