

Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, Mar 11th 2015

“Do not think I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.”

Matthew

My young Mormon colleague was exhausted after a long night of working with our student newspaper staff followed by going home to sick kids. He looked at me longingly as I sipped a cup of my favorite hazelnut coffee.

“On a day like today, I wish I could drink coffee,” he said. Meanwhile he dived into my candy bowl that I didn’t touch since I was fasting for Ash Wednesday.

I thought about our little exercise in rule following as I was pondering what Jesus means in today’s Gospel when he says he has not come to abolish laws and commandments but to fulfill them. Then I went home and virtuously ate shrimp, something no one observing Kosher dietary laws would do.

So what does Jesus mean? Somewhere along the line, Christians abandoned many of the strictures that Orthodox Jews follow. What laws and commandments from the Biblical era must we keep to avoid being “called least in the Kingdom of heaven?”

I’m guessing that Jesus is far more concerned about us keeping the two great commandments to love God and our neighbors than he is about our dinner menus and candy dishes. Our homily at Ash Wednesday Mass stressed viewing Lent as a time to more deeply encounter the love of God, to come alive to this love. Isn’t this love what Jesus likely means by saying he came to fulfill the law?

I’ll observe the rules about no meat on Fridays during Lent even though I wonder if God keeps track of who has to observe which dietary restrictions. Doesn’t he have more important concerns?

But since I tend to observe rules even when they seem pointless, I’m just glad that the Catholic rulebook does not ban coffee!

