

22nd Sunday of the Year

In today's first reading Moses calls the Israelites to keep the Law that they may live in the land as a wise people.

The Law, with its commandments, customs and statutes, was understood as the way of life indicated by God for his people. It is God's way of drawing close to the people.

The Law is God's ultimate gift of wisdom, inspiring his people to decide according to His will.

So, if they observe them carefully they will be truly wise and intelligent people and their way of life will make them a sign to the nations, a witness to who God is.

The point is, Moses regards the Law of God as the very source of life and identity for his people and their obedience to the Law is what makes them who they are.

In the Gospel Jesus, as it were, defends his disciples who seem to be infringing the 'law'; the traditions of elders by not washing their hands before eating.

Jesus defends his disciples by pointing out the difference between God's law/commandment and human tradition or interpretation.

Jesus tells the Pharisees and the scribes that they should not let fences they have built around the Law to supplant it. They should not allow their interpretation of the law to supersede the underlying intent of the Law itself. And the underlying intent of the Law is to draw us closer to God.

For the Law to draw us closer to God, Jesus, in the Gospel, calls for obedience that springs from the heart rather than mechanical conformity to a code of conduct. That is, Jesus calls for a conversion of heart; a renewal from within.

What I would like to say is that we should allow our observance of the Law and for that matter our relationship with God to transform every area of our interior world of thoughts and actions.

It is said that letting our relationship with God flow into and direct every area of our lives is a process that continues to unfold over a lifetime. There is a lifelong need for ongoing conversion.

Saint James, in the second reading tells us that all good giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights.

He goes on to tell us that our vocation as Christians is a free act of God's benevolence. So he encourages us to be Christians in practice, not in theory, to live according to the word or the law that has been planted in us.

He ends today's reading by saying, "**Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this:**

to care for orphans and widows and to keep oneself unstained by the world."

The point is true devotion; fulfilling one's duty to God is best expressed in the care of the most vulnerable members of society.

So when a member of the Church or the Church as a whole fails to take care of the most vulnerable members of community, the members of the community have the responsibility to call that person or the church back to integrity. This is what we have been doing in the past three weeks.

We are all aware of the report of Pennsylvania Grand Jury on abuse in the Church. We are disgust over the abuse of power and of conscience at the hands of priests.

The Pope and our bishops have acknowledged the failure of the Church leaders in protecting the minors and vulnerable adults and their handling of the cases.

The Church continues to seek the necessary means to ensure the safety and protection of the integrity of children and vulnerable adults.

And as Pope Francis wrote in his letter on August 20th 2018 to the people of God on the abuse in the Church, the Church wants us to be where the Lord wants us to be, to experience a conversion of heart. According to him, it is impossible to think of a conversion of our activity as a church that does not include active participation of all the members of God's people. The Pope has, therefore, invited all the faithful to prayer and penance. Our Bishop, his Excellency Barry Knestout has also invited us to pray for all victims of abuse at Mass of Atonement on Friday September 14, 7:00 p.m., at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, Richmond.

I know these are hard times for the Church and her members and the victims of the abuse. But in such difficult and sad moments let us hold on to our faith and remain faithful to our commitment to God and the Church in her brokenness. I believe by God's grace all shall be well.