



22nd SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME ***YEAR B – September 2, 2018***

The readings today remind us again that the laws of God are more important than the rules and regulations made by man. The first and second readings tell us about the Jewish experience in the time of Jesus, more than 2000 years ago.

When those Jews spoke about the law, they meant one of two things. They meant the written law or the oral law. The older and the more important of these two for them, was the written law. It is set down in the Torah, the first five books of the bible and is called the law of Moses. Some of these laws are concrete and specific. Others are very general, more like general norms than laws.

For a long time, Jews were content with these general norms and applied them to their lives as they saw fit. Beginning with the fifth century before Jesus, there emerged in Israel a group of legal experts called the scribes. They felt the general norms were too vague and should be spelled out in more detail and they proceeded to spell them out.

By the time of Jesus, the Jews observed these oral traditions just as minutely and faithfully as they did the written laws of the Torah. But while trying to do this something tragic happened. Slowly religion began to degenerate into an activity of performing external rituals. If you observe all the required rituals, you are pleasing God. If you do not observe them, you are committing sin.

Theoretically, someone might hate a member of his family or a next-door neighbor, thereby breaking the law of God. But that did not matter if he was faithful to the oral traditions of the scribes and pharisees. It was precisely this kind of religion that Jesus opposed, much to the dismay of the leaders of the people.

Observing external rituals does not make us holy people. Going to Mass every weekend, wearing the rite kind of clothing, singing all the right kind of songs, praying all the right kind of prayers, receiving communion with our hands in the right position, blessing ourselves with holy water as we enter and leave the church and fulfilling all the other rituals and traditions that have become a part of the Catholic Faith. All these things are not bad, but they don't make us good. If there is bitterness and pride in our hearts, we are not pleasing to God. The love of God is not in our hearts.

Our second reading from St. James reminds us again that genuine religion is this: to take care of widows and orphans - to practice the corporal and spiritual works of mercy - to help those who are in need. In short, what counts in religion is not the clothes we have on our bodies, but the love we have in our hearts. The external rituals are fine. But they are required by man. The love we should have in our hearts is required by God.

**For a few moments in prayful silence,
reflect on what it all means to you.**

