

22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)

You know, when the Jews were released from Egypt, they were pretty much an unruly mob. They had been slaves for as long as any of them could remember, and now with this new-found freedom, there was probably a lot of anarchy prevalent. It was probably like the 1960's when everybody wanted to "Do their own thing, man."

So, Moses called upon God, and God gave Moses the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. Ten simple rules, based mostly on natural law to keep things from getting out of hand, lest anarchic mayhem should prevail.

And Israel became the envy of the nations. To quote Moses, "For, what great nation is there that has gods so close to it as the Lord, Yahweh is to US... Whenever we call upon HIM!"

And therein lies the key, for after Moses decreed the first commandments, it seems that Men took things into their own hands, and they eventually got out of Hand. The books of numbers and Leviticus ramble on and on with ritual commands of how to dress, how to sacrifice animals and how to act. And later, even more is added on by the rabbinic tradition, known as the Mishna, until almost every aspect of life, including going to the bathroom, was governed by some kind of rules, rubric, command or tradition. Quite frankly—it was ridiculous. What started out as God-given law to maintain order and community was perverted into absurdity.

And that is why Jesus is so frustrated in today's Gospel, to the point of calling out the Pharisees and Scribes, reprimanding them as Hypocrites, and quoting Isaiah....

This people honors me with their lips,

But their hearts are FAR FROM me.

In vain do they worship me....

Teaching as doctrine.... Human precepts.

And so, the second reading from St. James, seems to put all things in perspective----

Be DOERS..... of the Word..... Not just HEARERS.

"Humbly welcome the Word that has been planted in you—and is able to SAVE YOUR SOULS!"

Of course, James is talking about the Word made Flesh, And as Catholics, we have a very intimate way of having that WORD—planted within our very bodies, through reception of the Eucharist....But as Jesus

says, it's what then comes forth from our hearts which defines us, and makes us either evil....or HOLY.

James goes on, "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained by the world."

That sounds to me like a practical paraphrase of Jesus' summary of the entire law---To love God above all, and love your neighbor as yourself.

Or, as St. Augustine, whose Feast Day is today (was just yesterday) says--- Love God.... And then, do, as you will. Because if you TRULY love God whole-heartedly, your will becomes ONE with God's will and you will do no wrong.--- Unfortunately, most of us haven't reached that point yet. Selfishness and self-will get in the way, so, we do need.... At least some laws, to keep us in check.

But as we struggle, let us imitate the ancient followers of Moses and Call upon our God. He will then draw close to us, and keep us wise and intelligent, so that what comes forth from our hearts in our actions.... May indeed be Holy.