

22nd Sunday of Ordinary Time – Yr B

September 1-2, 2018 by Kevin Williams

Mark 7: 1-8, 14-15, 21-23

In today's first reading from Deuteronomy, we hear Moses teaching the Israelites about the law God wants them to know and follow.

While the law came from God, it became known as the Law of Moses, or the Mosaic Law, because Moses was the one who taught it to the people. Now, this isn't just any old law. This law is a reflection of God's own heart, and God knew that if the people followed it, they stood a much better chance of living lives that were peaceful and fulfilled. It wasn't a guarantee, but it was a good step in the right direction.

Over the centuries, the Jewish people went through times when they followed the law well. However, there were other times when they came completely off the rails, falling into all sorts of evil practices and turning their backs on God and what He had taught them. By the time of Jesus, the people had been living under the oppression of foreign rulers for many years. There were times when they were able to govern themselves, but it never seemed to last. Sooner or later, another powerful country would conquer them and take possession of

their land. One thing the Jews could do was to try and observe the law of Moses faithfully. This helped them hold on to their identity as Jews while they were being oppressed. But over the years they forgot why they were doing these various practices. It just became something they did because they had always done it that way. That idea might sound familiar. I'll talk about that more in a few moments.

In today's gospel, we find Jesus confronting some of the people who had fallen into this false way of following the Mosaic law. The Pharisees and other religious leaders were doing many different things in the name of the Mosaic law, but they were doing them for the wrong reasons. The leaders were keeping the traditions alive, but they were completely forgetting why God wanted them to do these things in the first place. They didn't remember that what God really wanted was mercy, true contrition and repentance, and transformation. They were just blindly following the laws without any thought about what the laws were really for. And what were the laws really for? To get people to think about and worship God, and to draw them closer to Him. All along, what God desired was to have an intimate relationship with His people.

Well, that hasn't changed. It's still true that God's greatest desire is that we will let Him draw us closer to Him and let Him love us like we've never known. And that's where we come into the picture.

Can you think of something we do today where we come and just go through the motions, doing things because we've always done it that way? I can. We're there right now. We often don't really understand what happens at Mass. Over the years I've heard this general statement from adults and kids, "I like being Catholic and it's good to be part of the faith, but I find Mass boring. I don't understand it." I would venture to guess that most of us, at some point in our lives, have felt the same way. The good news is that you're here anyway. Thank you for being here, even if you don't understand the Mass. Now, if that's where you're at, you're not alone. I can tell you that when I was a kid and a young adult, that described me. Well, I want to propose to you that if we find Mass boring, it's because we haven't learned the deeper meaning and symbolism behind everything that happens at Mass. The Mass is much deeper and richer than you can imagine.

But we don't have to remain stuck in that boredom. There are more and more resources out there to help us learn more about the Mass. One of the things I do with the youth group is look for good videos about our faith. Recently, I saw a couple of videos done by a priest from Minnesota named Fr. Mike Schmitz. One of these videos you can find on YouTube. It's titled, "Motivation to go to Catholic Mass." In this video, which is less than ten minutes long, Fr. Mike talks about how we come to Mass expecting to be entertained, that we come wanting to get something out of Mass. But the point of Mass is not what we get out of it. The point is to come and worship God. Now, do we receive something during Mass? Of course we do. We receive God's Word and we receive God Himself, Jesus, in the Eucharist. Over the centuries, there have been many people who have given their lives just to be able to do that. And yet, sometimes we come to Mass and we don't appreciate what God is giving us. Now, do we need those things we receive? Absolutely. But if we come simply expecting to receive things, we're missing something. Why? Because the real point of Mass is to come and worship. Mass is not about us. It's about God. By the way, if you think you won't be able to remember the name of the video, I've taken care of that for you.

When you leave after Mass, there is a bulletin board on the right. I've put Fr. Mike's name, ministry and the name of the video on that bulletin board. You can write it down or take a picture of it with your cell phone so you can use it later. I hope to see a lot of people getting that information after Mass.

Fr. Schmitz has another video that's not on YouTube, it's on DVD. In this video he goes through all the parts of the Mass and he explains the meaning of what's going on. It's very enlightening. Because this one isn't on YouTube, you can't find it on the internet. But guess what? I have the DVD. When the Wednesday evening Faith, Food and Fellowship group starts meeting again, I plan to show that video. By the way, that's what the Faith, Food and Fellowship group is all about. That's what we do. We watch good videos that help us learn about our faith. Then we have a good discussion about what we watched. We also share a good meal together. If you're intrigued about that, we will start meeting again at the beginning of October. Listen for the announcements and come and join us. (pause)

The point of all of this is to help us see that if we are bored at Mass, we need to ask ourselves some questions, “Why am I bored? Am I missing something?”

You see, if we come to Mass with the wrong idea of what it’s all about, we become a bit like the Pharisees that Jesus confronts in today’s gospel. If we do that, we are short-changing ourselves and we don’t open ourselves to worshipping God as fully as we can. That’s a tragedy and it is something that saddens God.

But we can turn that around. We can start to see that Mass is actually heaven come to earth. We can start to see the Mass with new eyes, a new perspective. When we do, it will start to come alive for us and we will grow in our love for God and in our desire to serve God.

Hopefully, all of this will help us remember that our primary purpose for coming to Mass is to worship God. Amen!