

Bible Study

22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time, cycle B

Opening Prayer: (Sign of the Cross) “Holy God, we praise you for your eternal desire that we should know you as Creator and Lord, revealed to us through your Son Jesus. And we praise you for your desire that we be with you in heaven for all eternity, after our life on earth is completed. Open our ears today to hear your word, our hearts to receive it, and our wills to put it into practice. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.”

Questions before the readings

1. Can you identify one time this past week when you experienced God’s tender care for you?
2. Would you describe yourself as a “rule follower” or as a “flexible interpreter of rules”? Explain.

Commentary before the First Reading: Deuteronomy 4:1-2 and 6-8

“Deuteronomy” means “second law” in Greek. Many of the incidents and laws recorded in this book have already appeared in one of the first 4 books of the Torah. However, much of the book explains the previous laws in greater detail through a series of speeches by Moses to his beloved Israelites just before they cross over the Jordan into the Promised Land. He himself would not get to accompany them, as God had already told him that he would die before the others crossed. The beauty of the book is its tender, pastoral tone as Moses addresses his beloved people one final time.

Read the First Reading aloud.

1. What, according to Moses, will be the consequence of observing carefully all of God’s laws?
2. Why would it be dangerous for the religious leaders of the people to begin adding exemptions or conditions or extra requirements to the law as it was given to them by God through Moses?
3. Did you catch what was unique about God’s relationship with the Israelites, compared to the other nations of peoples around them?
4. One word – why did God give the Chosen People the Ten Commandments and other laws to guide their daily conduct? (If we miss this, we miss the whole point of the Sacred Scriptures and the Incarnation!)

Commentary before the Second Reading: James 1:17-18, 21b-22, 27

For the next six Sundays our Second Reading will be taken from the Letter of Saint James. This plain-spoken letter, most likely written by Jesus’ cousin James (not either of the Apostles named James), is one of the most pastoral of all the Epistles. Saint James was the first leader of the Church in Jerusalem and the surrounding area; he was stoned to death in 62 AD, according to the Jewish historian Josephus. The letter is addressed primarily to Christians of Jewish ancestry throughout the Mediterranean world. They are the words of a leader who has already suffered much for the faith and who knows that further suffering is certain.

Read the Second Reading aloud. You might find it helpful to include verses 23-26 in your reading.

1. To what does “the word” refer in this reading?
2. If “all good things come from above (that is, from God),” where does Saint James say that sin comes from? (Look back at verses 14-15.)
3. How does this awareness affect the conduct called for in the rest of this reading?
4. Much of this letter addresses living justly; according to Saint James, what is the only logical result of believing the teachings that we have learned are the Truth?

Commentary before the Gospel Reading: Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

We resume our more-or-less serial reading of the Gospel According to Mark today and we will continue to read from it now until the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ the King. Requirements for the careful washing of the body, clothing, and eating utensils were part of the law given by Moses to the Israelites. These laws contributed significantly to the health of the people. The Pharisees considered adherence to these and other laws as a sign of one’s sincere faith, and almost as a sign of one’s sure standing in right relationship with God. Jesus saw deeper into the question they posed.

Read the Gospel Reading out loud.

1. Which phrase of this reading echoed for you a passage from one of today’s earlier readings?

2. Can you identify a practical reason that God would have directed Moses to give the people these regulations about cleanliness just before they entered into the Promised Land?
3. By replying to the Pharisees' question with the quotation from Isaiah, what was Jesus really saying about them and the scribes who worked closely with them; what was his point?
4. Does verse 15 sound to you like a direct contradiction of the Hebrew laws? How can Jesus' statement be justified in light of the words of Moses from the First Reading?
5. Connect verses 21-23 to the Second Reading.

Applying the Readings to our Daily Lives

1. How would you describe your attitude towards the laws of God and the Church? Are you meticulous in observing every one of them? Do you pretty much ignore them and just do whatever feels right at the moment? Something in between?
2. Which of the commandments do you find most difficult to live up to? How does that affect your relationship with God – from your point of view and from God's?
3. Which of the laws/precepts of the Church do you find difficult to obey? What would help you with that?
4. What is the advantage for us in knowing God's laws regarding our conduct? Explain how commandments and laws can actually help us to grow closer to God, if we have the right attitude about them.
5. Can you give an example of a way that your life is better, richer because of your attempts to be faithful to God's commands?
6. Is there one thing you would like to focus on doing better this week?

Closing Prayer (based on Psalm 19: 8-11)

Your laws, O God, are perfect; obeying them refreshes and enlivens my spirit.

Your laws, O Lord, are trustworthy; examining them reveals to me your great wisdom.

Your laws, my God, reveal to me what is truly right and just; following them brings deep joy.

Your commands, my Lord, are clear; they show me the pathway on which I should walk.

To follow your desires is more important to me than all possessions, than even owning the purest gold.

So, continue to instruct me in your ways; lead me on the paths of righteousness; sweeten my life with obedience to your word; and lead me to eternal life with you in heaven. Amen.

(Sign of the Cross)