

11 am Mass 14 Trinity. Deuteronomy 1-2, 6-8; S. Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

Are you naughty? A natural law-breaker? One of those people who delights in being a little bit naughty. Or are you naturally a stickler for the rules. I suspect we're all a mix, depending on our mood or whether we're with that friend of ours who always has been a bad influence! I'm sure we've all got one! If you don't, then you are that person for your friends!

Being a bit cheeky is not the kind of rule-breaking that Jesus and his disciples are accused of in today's Gospel. And their eating without having ritually cleansed really can't be compared to stealing a biscuit from the tin. They are not being cheeky. St Mark is making a profound theological point.

Many people would read this Gospel and by it say – 'well look, Jesus tells people to just relax and forget all that silly law and ritual.' But elsewhere in the Gospels Jesus unequivocally says that not 'one jot of the Law will pass away' 'till heaven and earth' (S. Matt 5.18) do... why? Because He says He 'has not come to abolish the Law, but fulfil it' (S. Matt 5.17). And this is where we need to look. Jesus is not disobeying or belittling the law – He is making quite clear that He IS the Law. **He is the fulfilment of the Law**, the new Covenant. The old Law was given to Moses, it was spoken, and written and carved in stone. The *fulfilment* of that law has not been written in stone, it has been born of a woman, it has walked on dusty roads and healed the sick.

Some Christians are fond of talking of 'obeying God's Law'. I wonder if they understand that what they are talking about is a person, not a legal code.

Unlike our Jewish or Muslim brothers and sisters under Abraham, we Christians do not follow a Law-book, we follow a *person*. That person who we believe is the *Law made flesh*. Our lives are not a matter of 'dos' and 'donts', behaviours and practices. They are, in the words of St Paul, about 'putting on Christ' (Romans 13.14). Living 'till Christ be

formed in us' (Gal. 4.19). Going through life seeking our lives to become so united with His that it is 'no longer [you and me] that live, but Christ that is lives in [us]' (Gal. 2.20).

The mistake people make is to think 'phew! We don't have to obey all those rules. Being a Christian is easy! Great!'. The trouble is, legal codes however demanding can be easier to follow. As Christians we follow a person, not rules, but the person we follow is the crucified one. To follow the Christian Law is to empty out our lives in love, just as He did on the Cross. 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.' (Matt. 16.24).

The call to follow Christ can never be a tick list, our own or anyone else's. It is a much more radical call than to keep to some rules. It takes a whole life, lived for the Gospel.

The good news is that you can't make yourself a good Christian. In heaven we will not be perfect because we try hard – we will be perfect because we will be in perfect union with Him. It's that union that we seek now. We cannot follow Christ more faithfully by changing ourselves. Instead we are invited to draw near to Christ and thereby be transformed.

That's the pattern of Jesus in the Gospels. He does not ask sinners to change and then welcome them once they have earned it. They come to Him and by His love and forgiveness, by being with Him, they are transformed. Most of this transformation for us will only happen on the other side of death, but we are all called to be Saints. Those who, in this life, have drawn so near to Christ that His light is shining through them.

So how do we do it? Well, the truly holy people I have known have been people who don't *feel* holy at all. Holy people do not want to appear to do the right thing. They aren't people who have been trapped by guilt, or obligation, or fear – all that stuff is just toxic. They *are* people who have orientated their lives so that, so to speak, their eyes have been fixed on Christ. In prayer and worship, in amongst the everyday of work or family or fun, with strangers and

loved ones. These people have gently made their awareness of Christ the defining and undergirding reality of everything. With small beginnings, Christ has, so to speak, so drenched their living that others around them can't help but see it. As I say, they haven't normally been aware of it, because they weren't looking at themselves, judging and testing themselves or others, they were simply looking at Christ – that's how the whole thing happened in the first place.

As we come into church, do we take the Holy Water at the stoop by the door, make the Sign of the Cross and give thanks for our Baptism – remembering that our life has already been given to God? When we come to Holy Communion – do we make it the central reality of our lives each and every week, and ideally in the week too. A quiet Eucharist here, or finding a church near work or home with a midweek Eucharist time we put in our diary. Simple, ordinary but life-changing prayers – just for a few moments at the end and start of each day. At the kitchen worktop or in bed. Giving thanks, saying sorry, thinking back to see God's presence that day in our surroundings or in the people we met or passed by. Guarding a little time for silent prayer, maybe setting our iPhone timer for 5, 10, 15 mins to help. Making a time to read a little bit of the Gospel on the tube before we open our emails, or before we flick on the telly at home. Saying a prayer as a family together before breakfast or supper, or having a Bible story over tea-time. Being creative and habitual. All of those and more – I'm sure you have little things that help you and please, let's share our helpful tips amongst ourselves as we talk after the Eucharist.

All things, practices and rituals by which we don't follow a law of rules but orientate our lives to the true Law, the person Jesus. Day by day, we keep our eyes fixed on Him. So that, in the end He becomes at the heart of every piece of business, every relationship, every conversation, every moment, . With our eyes fixed on Him, we do life through Him, and with Him and in Him. Because ultimately that is what it's all about.