

22nd SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

St. Mark 7:18, 14-15, 21-23

James, a six year old boy, lived on a large farm with his family. As do many boys, he loved to explore and living in such a place there was much for him to see. From these explorations he would often bring home gifts for his mother—old bones, rocks, dead birds, and bits of machinery. With all this he naturally became quite dirty but he was never keen to wash his hands and would do anything to avoid having to clean himself. He would ignore his mother's pleas until eventually she would have to drag him to the bathroom. In spite of the torment for both James and his mother his mother persevered because she knew the value of hygiene and the protection it offered from illness and infection.

The Jewish Law similarly emphasised hygiene but the issue in the Gospel is not the rule itself but how the rule is used. For the Pharisees, observing the Law was fundamental for it determined whether a man was righteous or in proper relationship with God. They protested the seeming disregard of the Law by Our Lord and His disciples. But the Lord did not disregard the Law for He Himself said that He had come not to abolish the Law but to bring it to its fulfillment (see *Mt. 5:17*). What Our Lord objected to was simply following the Law for the sake of the Law for He understood that the Law was the means by which men and women were guided to seek the fullness of their humanity and to seek communion with God. If the Law was obeyed simply to obey the Law then it lacked purpose and became meaningless. The Law was there, as it is today, to protect us and to orient us so that the Law becomes the road we follow to lead us to that joy and communion we seek. It is the means by which we live with integrity and the means by which we assume responsibility.

A law is determined good or bad based not on the law itself but on its purpose. A good law seeks the common good and the good of man, whereas a bad law tears us apart and seeks the good of some but not all. The laws of our society regulate our behaviour and provide the framework in which we can live with one another. The laws of the Church regulate our worship of God and orient us to the fullness of our humanity. There is the Latin axiom, *lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi*, which means the law of worship is the law of belief which is the law of life. In other words, the way we worship is what we believe and is how we live. It is why the laws of the Church, whether they be the rubrics of the Mass or Canon Law or moral law do matter. These things do not exist for the sake of themselves but to orient us to He in whom we find our fulfillment. Take, for example, the laws or rubrics of the Mass. There are some who object to the demands to stand and kneel and sit or to the ablutions or cleansing of the sacred vessels. But these postures and these actions are a matter of the way in which we worship God which affects what we believe of God which affects how we live with or without God. To change these things or to disregard them would inevitably undermine what we believe which inevitably would undermine how we live.

We obey the laws of the Church because we believe they are the laws of God. Obedience is rarely considered a virtue today when independence and autonomy is considered the hallmark of humanity. But we are not politicians clambering for popularity or for acceptance. We are servants of God, who desires to draw us to Himself so that we may have life and have it to the full (see *Jn. 10:10*). For Jesus Christ is not a consultant but Our Lord and He said: "If you hold to my teaching... then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (*Jn. 8:31-32*).