

Pro-Cathedral

9 February 2022

Welcome

In yesterday's Gospel and in today's Gospel, Jesus is shown attacking the tendency of the Pharisees to detailed regulation and to appearance. It would be tempting to feel satisfied and superior: those awful Pharisees, what were they thinking?

Topic

It would be far more realistic to look at ourselves and see the very same tendencies.

Steps

In our Catholic tradition, there was a very similar tendency to detailed regulation. When I was a child, Friday abstinence was strictly observed – absolutely no meat. At home we had a bottle of HR sauce and on the bottle it said intended for meat. I did wonder as a child if it would be ok to use sauce *intended* for meat on the Friday fish. Silly, of course, but you can see where it came from. There were also detailed regulations about what you could and could not do on a Sunday, how far you could travel etc. Then you had devotional commitment such as the nine first Fridays and so on. None of this was for the faint-hearted and not all of it has disappeared.

There are immense risks with such an approach. There is the risk of hypocrisy, with a big emphasis on external regulations and appearances. Even more important, there is a risk of missing the heart of the matter. One of the penetrating prophets of the Old Testament put it like this:

Spare me the din of your chanting,
let me hear none of your playing on the guitar
let justice flow like water,
and uprightness like a never-failing stream! (Amos 5:23-24)

Another prophet asks the all-important question what does God require of us? The answer can guide us still today:

He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the LORD require of you
but to do justice,
and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8)

In another part of the Gospel, Jesus – also a prophet – sums it all up for us:

Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:29-3).

Conclusion

In other words, while we need some structures, some rules, while we need some externals, nevertheless beware. God looks to the heart and he wants us to love him and to love our neighbour from the inside out.