

An Obedience in Freedom

I. A LOOK AT THE THREE READINGS

FIRST READING (Deut 4:1-2,6-8)

¹Now therefore, Israel, **hear the statutes and ordinances** I am teaching you to observe, that you may live, and may enter in and take possession of the land which the LORD, the God of your ancestors, is giving you. ²In your observance of the **commandments** of the LORD, your God,^a which I am **commanding** you, you shall not add to what I **command** you nor subtract from it. ⁶Observe them carefully, for this is your wisdom and discernment in the sight of the peoples, who will **hear** of all these statutes and say, “This great nation is truly a wise and discerning people.”^{7c} For what great nation is there that has gods so close to it as the LORD, our God, is to us whenever we call upon him? ⁸Or what great nation has **statutes and ordinances** that are as just as this whole law which I am setting before you today?

THE FOCUS: Hearing and Observing the Commandments

COMMENTARY

- The book of Deuteronomy repeats the commandments found in Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers, that is why, it is called “second law” or a “copy of the Law.”
- Now the commandments are put into the mouth of Moses.
- In Deuteronomy, Moses is presented as reminding the Israelites all the laws of God before they enter the promised Land.
- It is in the form of a homily and exhortation (*parenesis*).



Even Jesus had to bear suffering to obey till the end

- Our Reading gives us the reason why Israel should hear the statutes and decrees:
 - That you may live.
 - That you may enter in and take possession of the Promised Land.
- Another reason:
 - To give evidence of their wisdom and intelligence to other nations.

REFLECTIONS

God is like an old man who likes to remind. Moses is God’s instrument in reminding people of his commandments.

In the commandments are assured their well-being and future.

People must be reminded because they are forgetful.

There is a devastating effect on forgetfulness.

Possession of the land is not automatic, as they will be reminded later, when they lose the land after 1000 years.

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There should be no mistake that possession of the land is unconditional.

The Israelites are secure only in the land when they keep God's commandments.

We too living in these modern and post-modern times can lose what we have, lose God's blessings if we don't follow God's commands.

We should base our wisdom, not on the world, but on God's commandments.

If we are disconnected from God, we are living on our own. Living in independence, autocracy, relying on our own "intelligence" is courting our own destruction and death.

In return to the goodness of God, we must do what is expected of us:

- To live like first-fruits (acceptable to God).
- To avoid anything that contradicts our giftedness.

It would be illogical to do what is evil: filthiness and evil excess, whatever that means.

It would be logical to do more than just listening to the word. We must put to actions what we learn by listening.

Concrete actions that are demanded of Christians in their right minds are:

- taking caring care of the poor, like the widows and the orphans;
- saying "no" to the seductions of the world.

Christian life is not a joke.

SECOND READING (Jas 1:17-18,21-22,27)

Exposition

¹⁷All good giving and every perfect gift* is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no alteration or shadow caused by change. ¹⁸ⁱHe willed to give us birth by the word of truth that we may be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.*

Exhortation

²¹ⁱTherefore, put away all filth and evil excess and humbly welcome the word that has been planted in you and is able to save your souls.

^{22m}Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deluding yourselves ^{27p}Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows* in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

THE FOCUS: Living Clean Lives

REFLECTIONS

God has given good and perfect gifts.

Realization of this should be enough to make us thankful of him.

GOSPEL READING (Mk 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23)

On hypocrisy (teachings of the Pharisees and Scribes)

^{1*} "Now when the Pharisees with some scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, ²they observed that some of his disciples ate their meals with unclean, that is, unwashed, hands. ³(For the Pharisees and, in fact, all Jews, do not eat without carefully washing their hands,* keeping the tradition of the elders. ⁴And on coming from the marketplace they do not eat without purifying themselves. And there are many other things that they have traditionally observed, the purification of cups and jugs and kettles [and beds].) ⁵So the Pharisees and scribes questioned him, "Why do your disciples not follow the tradition of the elders* but instead eat a meal with unclean hands?"



On giving true worship (teachings of Jesus)

^{6b}He responded, “Well did Isaiah prophesy about you hypocrites, as it is written:

‘This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me;

⁷In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines human precepts.’

⁸You disregard God’s commandment but cling to human tradition^{14d}He summoned the crowd again and said to them, “Hear me, all of you, and understand. ¹⁵Nothing that enters one from outside can defile that person; but the things that come out from within are what defile.”^{21g}From within people, from their hearts, come evil thoughts, unchastity, theft, murder, ²²adultery, greed, malice, deceit, licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, folly. ²³All these evils come from within and they defile.”

THE FOCUS: Being True to the Word of God

COMMENTARY

- The Gospel Reading contrasts the teaching of the scribes and the Pharisees with that of Jesus.
- It is a matter of interpretation of the same thing.
- Everyone wanted to do the will of God as written in the Torah.
- How do the scribes and Pharisees interpret? On washing of hands before eating, nothing is wrong really. In fact, it is hygienic. However, the ordinary washing of hand has a religious meaning for the scribes and Pharisees, and they were scandalized why the disciples of Jesus do not do the ordinary hygienic and religious practice.
- Jesus, on the other hand, criticizes the scribes and the Pharisees. Jesus sees more than the faithful washing of hands before eating.

- He smells something fishy in their implementation: hypocrisy.
- They may be doing what is written, but their hearts are far away from God.
- True religion demands closeness, intimacy with God, not robotic love (=doing mechanically the laws)
- One may do correct things, but with wrong motives.
- The heart must change. Unconverted heart defiles, not the dirt and microbes in the hands.

REFLECTIONS

Jesus hates hypocrisy.

Hypocrisy is doing right things with a wrong motive.

Hypocrisy is doing right things without changing the heart.

Unconverted hearts will still issue evil things, even if the hands are doing good.

Good actions must be accompanied with good intentions.

Christ’s followers must be able to discern what comes from God and what comes from humans. (*hindi dapat ta-tanga-tanga, dapat matalino lagi ang Cristiano*)

Hypocrites pass as coming from God, that which actually comes from them.

II. TYING THE THREE READINGS TOGETHER TO DEVELOP YOUR HOMILY/SHARING

The First Reading focuses on the importance of hearing and doing the commandments of God.

The Second Reading focuses on not violating the laws of God.



The Gospel Reading focuses on the correct application of the commandments of God.

Proposal for your homily

You can tell a story about a disciplined people (*like the Japanese or Germans*). They do not cross the street if the traffic light is red. They follow instructions.

You can also tell a story about an undisciplined people (like us Filipinos). *Chaotic, anarchic. Happy to violate a law without being caught. Since we do not follow laws (rules, instructions), our properties easily get destroyed. Our cars are overloaded, not maintained according to specifications. Drivers drive slow at high gear. Our electrical supplies are overloaded causing fires. People do not pay their dues on or before time, causing them to pay more for fines and arrears.*

Now discuss the importance of hearing and doing God's laws:

–Doing God's words assures of his continued help, protection and blessings (First Reading).

–As graced people, we live according to our dignity as children of God. We do not defile ourselves with sins, but do something serious like helping the poor (Second Reading).

–In doing God's word, we must avoid hypocrisy (Gospel Reading).

Salvation cannot be attained without following any rule (law).

More so, if we do not follow the teachings of Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Christians should be able to discern established rules of the land, of the church and of God.

We must avoid what contradicts the law of God (taught by Jesus).

To be able to do this, we must be catechized very well. Our catechism books tell us what is lawful and what is not. To have higher

awareness, we must also study ethics or moral theology or simply the church's teachings (on faith and morals). We must read the social encyclicals (the church's best hidden secrets).

We should not bank on our ignorance. God does not like ignorance of his law. God wants the Israelites to show to other nations that they are intelligent. They know God's will and they do it.

God does not like hypocrisy. Many Catholics like to serve in the mass while they hate their in-laws, their priests and fellow church workers. They speak against them right after mass. Some are thieves; they steal from the collection box. Others spread gossip. Many big shot Catholics are very generous to the priests, bishops, to the church, but not to their maids, workers, etc. Hypocrites!

End by relating the laws of God to the eucharist. Participation in the eucharist is doing the law of God. The ones entitled to participate in the eucharist are those who sincerely keep the law of God and of the Church (those who practice love and justice = true religion).

-Fr. Cielo Almazan, OFM

III. OUR CONTEXT

1. Examine situations in our families and parishes that make us legalistic and more hypocritical.

2. Count your blessings. As a graced person, how do share your blessings with others?

3. Recount an incident when someone told you you are a blessing to his or her life. How did it happen? **(HM)**.