

**TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME [B]**

**Deuteronomy 4: 1 – 2, 6 – 8**

**James 1: 17 – 18, 21 – 22, 27**

**ark 7: 1- 8, 14 – 15, 21 – 23**

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Our lives are made up of lots of little habits, rules, and rituals of our own making.

Always putting your left sock on first, having a favourite cup for your coffee, always sitting in the same seat in Church.....

And they make us feel comfortable because we like the security of those little everyday things.

That's fine; unless those harmless habits turn into a rigid ritual, and then into superstition.

As the People of God prepare to enter the Promised Land, Moses reminds them to: "Listen carefully to the laws and customs I teach you today, and observe them, that you may have life."

Deut. 4: 1

And Moses does this in order to open their hearts so that the Lord can: 'Put His law deep within them, and write them on their hearts, so that he will be their God, and they will be His people.

See Jer. 31: 33

Those laws are summed up in the 10 Commandments that today, even amongst some Christians, are thought to be irrelevant, and out of date.

Jesus, they say, came to do away with rules, and regulations.

All we need, they say, is love.

But love can mean anything from, 'I love that colour,' to,

'I love you with all my heart,' unless it's underpinned by structure, and commitment – law and love.

James, in his Letter, which we've just heard an extract from, marries together law and love.

He says that "If you look carefully into [God's] perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it." Jm. 1: 25

In other words our love of God isn't to be a hollow: it's to be made flesh through our lives reflecting the holiness of God.

So we mustn't: "Think of belief as a private act. Faith is choosing to stand with the Lord so as to live with him." Pope Benedict XVI: Porta Fidei: 10

Our love of God must be earthed in real life, and also make a complete difference to how we think, act, live, and treat each other.

Sadly, we often use the externals of our faith as a pale excuse for standing with the Lord so as to live with Him.

If we think we love God through a joyless commitment to the Christian faith, we're not.

That sort of commitment is like a cheap chocolate Easter egg: it looks fine on the outside; but, break it open, and it's hollow.

This is where we are in Mark's Gospel today; with the Pharisees coming to confront Jesus about His Disciples laxity in following the religious law.

The Pharisees believed that by meticulously following the Law of the Lord, and by adding layer upon layer of their own to it, that made them righteous in His sight.

Every moment and action of their lives was governed by a rite or ritual.

Yet, in so doing, they'd: "Put aside the commandment of God to cling to human traditions."

Mk. 7: 8

But Jesus sees right through their rigid, legalistic, and ritualistic interpretation of God's Law; and His answer to them is to point them to God's Word – Scripture – and to the Prophet Isaiah through whom the Lord had spoken these words: "These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. For they teach man-made ideas as commands from God."

Mk. 7: 6 (Is. 29: 13)

In Jesus we see the reality of God's nature made flesh; and the Law of God, and the worship of God, lived perfectly because His heart beats in time with His Father's heart.

Let that not lead us to think that we will never ever get close to that; that our hearts will always beat to a different drum so that we'll never live the Lord's law of love.

The Lord doesn't set us impossible goals that we'll never be able to achieve.

If He asks us to do something, He'll give us the grace to achieve it; because it's indelibly:

"Written into the human heart, to set out to find the One whom we would not be seeking had he not already set out to meet us." Pope Benedict XVI: Porta Fidei; 10

The great comedian, Bob Hope, once said this: "If you haven't any charity in your heart, you have the worst kind of heart trouble."

If we don't have the love of Jesus embedded in our hearts, then we'll suffer from eternal terminal heart trouble.

But: "If [we] look carefully into [God's] perfect law that sets [us] free, and if [we] do what it says and don't forget what [we've] heard, then God will bless [us] for doing it." Jm. 1: 25

Then our hearts: "The authentic sacred space within us, is opened by grace."

Pope Benedict XVI: Porta Fidei; 10

By the Lord's indwelling grace we'll be enabled to: "Humbly accept the word God has planted in [our] hearts, [which] has the power to save [our] souls. [However, we mustn't] just listen to God's word. [We] must do what it says. Otherwise [we're just] fooling ourselves." Jm. 1: 21 – 22