

Homily **15th Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year C** (14.7.19)

You know, we could think today is about law versus love, but that's not the issue at all. The issue is very much about an understanding of law. And it starts in childhood, everybody here, and all who here who are parents, we lay down the law for our children. We give them boundaries and rules to obey so that they may grow up, hopefully, discerning right from wrong and the consequences.

There's a parishioner here, not in this mass, and I love the story he told me about his daughter who was very rebellious, and she'd been banging a drum for 10 minutes when she was a little girl. And he said,

"Right, you've had 10 minutes on that. That's enough. No more banging from now on."

So she gave a little flurry, **"Duh-duh-duh-duh."**

He said,

"I've told you. No more banging of the drum."

So she went, **"Duh."**

He said,

"If you do that again, it will be taken off you and you'll never see it again." **"Duh."** So he took it away, and there were tears all day.

I love that story.

[laughter]

She didn't do it again.

[laughter]

The thing is, we need rules and boundaries, but the trouble is it doesn't become a rule of life until we grow up and if it becomes a dynamic... Well, when we grow up, of course, the modern state gives us laws from not parking on double yellow lines to murder, and of course some are statutory, some are natural rights. And we've got so used to having a hierarchy of laws that we understand the source and structure and purpose, even if occasionally we disobey them, not murder, but parking on double yellow lines. And the trouble with law like this, which the ancient world didn't understand, is we see it as not getting caught because it's against what the authorities want us to do. But in the ancient world, in Moses' day when he brought the Ten Commandments from Mount Sinai, and the subsequent law that built it around the Book of Leviticus, this wasn't about that at all.

It was meant to be an inner dynamic by which a tribe or people could govern their community good and give the individual a purpose and a growth in their spirit. And that's why you have those lovely body of psalms that we sang today,

"The law of the Lord is perfect. It revives the soul."

This wasn't about not getting caught, not obeying society's rules. This was about an inner dynamic that governed the way I behave, but of course, and for my good as well as the good of others. But humans being humans tend

to fall into casuistry. In other words minimalism. What's the minimum I need to do to obey the law and be okay? The Church got into this. The old code of Canon Law was full of it. It was replaced in 1985. And the old code, I told you this recently, laid down minute detail for everything like fasting and so on, and abstinence. And it even said,

"If you were late for mass, as long as you got there in time to hear the Gospel, and if you were in a rush, as long as you waited till the priest had received communion, and then you could go, you'd attended mass."

Don't do it!

[laughter]

It's not a good practice, but it created that. You'd talk to the number of Irish people who'd tell you, in Ireland where they loved just minimalism, the number of men that used to turn up for the Gospel and were outside after the priest's communion smoking. It's typical of human beings to go into casuistry. And it loses its inner dynamic. And this lawyer approaches Jesus, first of all to disconcert Him, but he answers Jesus brilliantly. He gives the dynamism of the law, which is about being focused on God, and love of God, and then dealing with your neighbour in that just and charitable way that God has taught, living the law from the heart, not from some sort of codified guidance.

But he says he was anxious to justify himself, and being a lawyer, he was used to casuistry. So he wanted Jesus to box in very carefully what he had to

do to find the right person to treat as a neighbour. So what does Jesus do? He tells a story. He doesn't fall for the booby trap. He refuses to go into casuistry. He tells a story that's visionary, open-ended, and leaves us to meditate on the whole purpose of what's being said. And He purposely chooses someone who was least likely to be a neighbour in the Jewish eyes; the Samaritans who followed God's law, but they were thought to be heretics. So He chooses him on purpose, and he's the one in the story, of course, who is following the law as an inner dynamic, love of God and love of neighbour. So that's why it says he is moved to compassion. It doesn't say he looked up the rule book to see what he should do. He was moved with compassion because the law was an inner dynamic for him. And so He says then to the lawyer,

"Who proved the good neighbour?"

"The Samaritan, the outcast."

And He says,

"Go and do the same yourself."