

- Now this Gospel is often used by our non-Catholic Christian brethren—well-meaningly—to “correct” our Catholic dependence on early apostolic tradition.
  - Remember, again, that the teaching of the Church is founded on three pillars—scripture (which is itself tradition), the apostolic tradition and practice of the early Church, and the theological determinations—based in the other two—of the Magisterium—the pope and bishops, aided in their work by theologians around the world.
  - But Jesus does not condemn tradition; He condemns the disregarding of God’s Word and commandment.
  - Tradition for tradition’s sake is pointless, and can even stray into superstition. But the tradition that the Church clings to is that which is in accord with scripture and the early Church practice.
  - This is why the Church will, at times, even suppress local traditions which have often sprung up—not as much in our day, but in the past.
  - It’s like the reading we had earlier this week when Jesus said: *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You pay tithes of mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier things of the law: judgment and mercy and fidelity...”*
  - Thus we must always keep perspective. As is said: “The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.”
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- Similarly, in our readings over the next several weeks are two primary themes: trust in God’s love, and obedience to His Word—which themselves are an extension of His love for us, just as the rules of any parent are for the good of his children.

- But, as Jesus just noted in our Gospel, the commandments are not the end of it, and we are not called to simple rote obedience of rules and regulations...though neither are they to be disregarded.
- But, rather, He says: *“From within people, from their hearts, come evil thoughts, unchastity, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, folly. All these evils come from within, and THEY defile.”*

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- The commandments and moral law of God are rules of restraint, but the grace of God seeks to turn us to not simply obey rules, but to a desire to do the good to, and for, each other—the law of charity.
  - Obedience is first and is a foundation, but we are to build upon it, and not rest on it alone.
  - It’s very much like children vs. adulthood: young children know their parents’ rules and follow them as long as they can’t get away with NOT following them. But the adult child realizes by experience that what his parents taught him is simply wisdom, and even necessity.

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- Yet the scriptures and the teaching of the Holy Spirit through the Church are there to help guide and encourage us toward the ever-greater good...that we may seek to be holy, as our Heavenly Father is holy, as Jesus exhorts us.
  - The commandments, then, are given as sort of a minimal standard.
  - As Jesus tells us in the Sermon on the Mount...with the grace that He bring with His coming, His crucifixion, resurrection and ascension, and the subsequent coming of the Holy Spirit, we are called to surpass and exceed that minimum and always strive toward the maximum—to be holy as He is holy.

- And does not the “commandment bolstered by grace” concept not correlate with the image given us by St. John in the book of Revelation: “...[the angel] carried me away to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God...It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates...and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed...And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.” (Revelation 21:10-14)
  - Thus, observance of the moral law of God given to Israel gets us in the gates, but the whole city—and our presence within it—rests upon the foundation of the teaching of the apostles, which is the teaching of Christ—the teaching of God.
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- So, let us remember the teaching of St. James in our second reading today...that God “...willed to give us birth by the word of truth, that we may be a kind of firstfruits [choicest] of His creatures.”
  - And so, as James continues: “Humbly welcome the word that has been planted in you and is able to save your souls. Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deluding yourselves.”
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- Often in our day we hear people say they are “spiritual”, but not religious. In other words, they do what they “feel” is right, but don’t want to follow direction.
- But because we have so many influences on us in the world, such a person in serious danger of thinking himself his own god...the ultimate judge of what is beneficial or harmful...what is good or evil.
- Almost inevitably, that leads to simply embracing the values of society in order to receive societal acceptance rather than a rigorous search for truth.

- But it's similar to saying that "I like science, but not mathematics," or "I want to be a doctor, but don't like biology."
- Well, as any physicist or scientist will tell you, without math you can't advance very far in the knowledge or practice of any scientific discipline...for any discipline requires discipline, and the following of what IS.
- "Religion" in general is simply following the direction and teaching of one's perceived reality of the divine. We know that is the one true God.
- And so, as James exhorts us today, BE doers of the word...BE religious, in the ultimate and best sense of the word, remembering Jesus' command to the apostles: "*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.*" ... " (Matthew 28:19-20)

Reading 1

[Dt 4:1-2, 6-8](#)

Moses said to the people:

“Now, Israel, hear the statutes and decrees  
which 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 fathers, is giving you.  
In your observance of the commandments of the LORD, your God,  
which I enjoin upon you,  
**you shall not add to what I command you nor subtract from it.**  
Observe them carefully,  
for thus will you give evidence  
of your wisdom and intelligence to the nations,  
who will hear of all these statutes and say,  
‘This great nation is truly a wise and intelligent people.’  
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?  
Or what great nation has statutes and decrees  
that are as just as this whole law  
which I am setting before you today?”

Responsorial Psalm

[Ps 15:2-3, 3-4, 4-5](#)

R. (1a) **One who does justice will live in the presence of the Lord.**

Whoever walks blamelessly and does justice;  
who thinks the truth in his heart  
and slanders not with his tongue.

R. **One who does justice will live in the presence of the Lord.**

Who harms not his fellow man,  
nor takes up a reproach against his neighbor;  
by whom the reprobate is despised,  
while he honors those who fear the LORD.

R. **One who does justice will live in the presence of the Lord.**

Who lends not his money at usury  
and accepts no bribe against the innocent.

Whoever does these things  
shall never be disturbed.

R. **One who does justice will live in the presence of the Lord.**

Reading II

[Jas 1:17-18, 21b-22, 27](#)

Dearest brothers and sisters:

All 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.  
He willed to give us birth by the word of truth  
that we may be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

Humbly welcome the word that has been planted in you  
and is able to save your souls. Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deluding yourselves.

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.

Gospel

[Mk 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23](#)

When the Pharisees with some scribes who had come from Jerusalem  
gathered around Jesus,  
they observed that some of his disciples ate their meals  
with unclean, that is, unwashed, hands.

—For the Pharisees and, in fact, all Jews,  
do not eat without carefully washing their hands,  
keeping the tradition of the elders.

And 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. —

So 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?”

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;*

*in vain do they worship me,*

*teaching as doctrines human precepts.*

You disregard God’s commandment but cling to **human tradition.**”

He summoned the crowd again and said to them,

“Hear me, all of you, and understand.

Nothing that enters one from outside can defile that person;  
but the things that come out from within are what defile.

“From within people, from their hearts,  
come evil thoughts, unchastity, theft, murder,  
adultery, greed, malice, deceit,  
licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, folly.  
All these evils come from within and they defile.”