

## **Friday (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)**

How exactly does the righteousness of the Pharisees differ from that of the disciples? Certainly the Pharisees never imagined that the law must be taught but not obeyed. No, it was rather their ambition to be doers of the law. Their idea of righteousness was a direct, literal and practical fulfilment of the commandment, their ideal was to model their behaviour exactly on the demands of the law. This is where the righteousness of the disciples exceeds that of the Pharisees; it is grounded solely upon the call to fellowship with him alone who fulfils the law. It is the real and active faith in the righteousness of Christ. Jesus Christ and he alone fulfils the law, because he alone lives in perfect communion with God.

### **Scripture (Galatians 3:21,23-26)**

***Is the Law contrary to God's promises? Out of the question! If the Law that was given had been capable of giving life, than certainly saving justice would have come from the Law. Before faith came, we were kept under guard by the Law, locked up to wait for the faith which would eventually be revealed to us. So the Law was serving as a slave to look after us, to lead us to Christ, so that we could be justified by faith. But now that faith has come we are no longer under a slave looking after us; for all of you are the children of God, through faith, in Christ Jesus.***

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22nd Week of Ordinary Time

### **God's Law: do I stick to it or live it?**

*When the Pharisees and Scribes ask Jesus why he allows his disciples to eat without washing their hands, (Mark 7), there is far more to it than a discussion about a seemingly minor rule. These important authority figures would not have travelled from Jerusalem unless there was important business to settle, that is, to check out what this charismatic and, by now, influential figure is about with his radical teaching. For him to publicly allow his followers to flout this rule gives them the excuse to challenge him. Their question is a perfectly reasonable one because the rules about washing is about ritual cleanliness, i.e. the rules that govern what makes a person worthy or not ('unclean') to approach God. As these rules have the authority of tradition, passed down through the generations, Jesus' represents a challenge by questioning the authority of tradition, and possibly of the foundations of the religion which is founded on the Torah, (meaning 'instruction' or 'direction given'). I imagine the disciples (who had been brought up to respect the rules and the authorities as passing on God's Law) must have felt 'we're in trouble now', but rather than answering the question, Jesus attacks the questioners by calling them hypocrites, which literally means 'face hidden behind a mask'. He also appeals to tradition, (the prophet Isaiah), and so cuts straight to the heart of the argument: does God want ritual and rules, or rules written on the heart? Or rather, external rituals that become internalised. When Moses is preparing his people to enter the Promised Land, (without him), he is very clear about the importance of observing the laws and customs he teaches, and is equally clear that the people are to neither add nor take anything from them. I imagine this was something uppermost in the mind of Jesus' opponents, since their role is to guard and pass on the teachings. In breaking the rules, and then going on to teach that all food is clean, (Mk. 7:19), surely he is saying 'it's alright to do away with these rules'. And the Sabbath? And treatment of Gentiles? And so on and so on. I am sure the Pharisees would object to Jesus' accusation that they are 'putting aside the commandment of God to cling to human tradition'. They would claim (fairly, I think) that they were applying the teachings of Moses to concrete, everyday situations precisely so that ordinary (uneducated) people could keep the Law. The problem is that over time, this has become 'lip-service': the rules, which were originally to help apply God's Law have become the law. Jesus' point is that it is not something external that makes a person unworthy to approach God, it is what is in the heart. These divisions and arguments were very real for Mark's audience, and are still played out today (e.g in the strong reactions for and against Pope Francis in our church). Perhaps in focusing so much on trying to cover every detail and not breaking the rules, the Pharisees have an image of God as a stern, watchful police officer whose focus is on watching for lawbreakers. When Moses laid down the rules, there was no mention of 'Keep them or else', nor was God detached. God's Laws were 'so that you may have life'. In them is a wisdom and understanding (of what it is to be fully human) far beyond our own. If God's people keep them, other people would notice this wisdom, then they would learn that God is far more intimate and caring than their gods... and so come to know the love of God. Perhaps an important question for us, individually and as a church, is do people see the rules or the rule-giver in how we live our lives? Martin Bennett*

### **Monday (Meister Eckhart)**

We must learn to break through things and to grasp God in them, allowing him to take form in us powerfully and essentially. It is the same as when someone wants to learn to write; if they wish to learn this skill, then they must practise hard and often, however difficult it may seem, even to the point of impossibility. If they do that they will master the art of writing, although of course they will at first have to concentrate on every letter and commit it to memory. But then, when they have acquired this skill, they will no longer have any need for the image or the concentration, but will write freely and spontaneously. Thus we should be permeated with the sense of a divine presence and be in-formed with the form of our beloved God and be so established in him that we see his presence effortlessly.

### **Scripture (Mt. 22:34-40)**

*When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they got together and, to put him to the test, one of them put a further question 'Master, which is the greatest commandment of the Law?' Jesus said to him 'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. The second resembles it; you must love your neighbour as yourself.' On these two commandments hang the whole of the Law, and the prophets too.'*

### **Tuesday (The Desert Fathers)**

A brother came to Theodore of Pherme and began to talk about matters of which he had no experience. Theodore said to him, "You've not yet found a ship to sail in, nor put your luggage aboard, nor put out to sea, and you're already acting as if you were in the city which you mean to reach. If you make some attempt to do the things you are discussing, then you can talk about them with understanding."

### **Scripture (Ps. 14)**

*Lord, who shall dwell on your holy mountain? Those who walk without fault, who act with justice and speak the truth from the heart. Those who do no wrong to their brother and sister, who cast no slur on their neighbour, who hold the godless in disdain but honour those who fear the Lord. Those who keep their pledge come what may; who take no interest on a loan and accept no bribes against the innocent. Such a person will stand firm for ever.*

### **Wednesday (St. Augustine)**

What the law of works enjoins by threat, the law of faith secures by faith. By the law of works, God says to us 'Do what I command'; by the law of faith we say to God 'Give me what you command.' This is why the law commands—to advise us what faith ought to do, so that the person to whom the command is given, if they are as yet unable to perform it, may know what to ask for. In the Old Testament the finger of God was written on tablets of stone; in the New Testament it was on our hearts.

### **Scripture (Dt. 4:1-2,6-8)**

*You must add nothing to what I command you, and take nothing from it, but keep the commandments of the Lord your God just as I lay them down for you. Keep them, put them into practice, and other people will admire your wisdom and prudence. Once they know what all these laws are, they will exclaim, "No other people is as wise and as prudent as this great nation!" And indeed, what great nation has its gods as near as Yahweh our God is to us whenever we call to him?*

### **Thursday (Anthony de Mello)**

The local priest was often seen talking to an extremely attractive woman of bad repute—and in public places too—to the great scandal of his congregation. Eventually he was summoned by his bishop for a dressing-down. When the bishop had finally finished, the priest said, "Your Excellency, I have always held that it is better to talk to a beautiful woman with one's thoughts set on God than to pray to God with one's thoughts fixed on a beautiful woman."

### **Scripture (Mark 7:5-8, 15)**

*The Pharisees and the Scribes asked Jesus 'Why do your disciples not respect the traditions of the elders but eat their food with unclean hands?' He answered, 'How rightly Isaiah prophesied about you hypocrites in the passage of scripture: 'This people honours me only with lip service while their hearts are far from me. Their reverence of me is worthless; the lessons they teach are nothing but human commandments.' You put aside the commandments of God to observe human traditions. Nothing that goes into someone from the outside can make that person unclean; it is the things that come out of a someone that make the person unclean.'*