



PO Box 271227 + Flower Mound, TX + 75027 + 1-800-803-0118 + www.dritaly.com

Tradition, Tradition

by: Dr. Marcellino D'Ambrosio

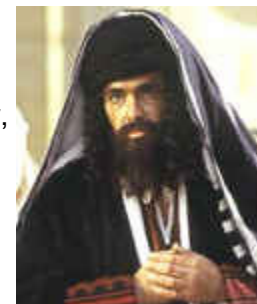


One of the great battle cries of the Protestant Reformation was “sola scriptura!” It seemed to many that the problem with the Catholic Church over the centuries was that it had added all sorts of practices, customs and doctrines. They read Jesus’ critique of the Pharisees’ traditions in this Sunday’s gospel and thought they’d recognized the same Pharisaical approach in the church of their day. The solution, it seemed, was simple. Let’s purify the Church by ditching all these traditions and keep the Bible alone.

But if we read this portion of the Bible closely, the Lord is not telling us that tradition is a dirty word. His apostle Paul, in fact, tells us in 2 Thes 2:15 to “hold fast to the traditions you received from us, either by our word or by letter.”

“Tradition” simply means something that is handed or passed on from one person to another, one generation to another. One question that needs to be asked in the case of any particular “tradition” is where it comes from. How we value it depends on its origin. Jesus? His apostles? Some pious believers of some bygone era? The traditions Paul passed down were divine (from the Lord) and apostolic traditions, like the meaning and importance of the Eucharist (1 Cor 11:23-34) or the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor 15:3-11) and so were of the utmost importance.

The traditions of the Pharisees were quite a different matter. They were not of themselves evil. But they were pious customs of human origin passed down to support the living out of the law. Unfortunately, the Pharisees seemed incapable of distinguishing divine law from its human support system. Worse than that, they actually used pious customs as loopholes to help them get around the difficult demands of God’s law.



If you get your Bible out and read the full text of Mark Chapter 7,

PO Box 271227 + Flower Mound, TX + 75027 + 1-800-803-0118 + www.dritaly.com

you'll get a clearer picture of this. Everyone knows that when God gave Moses and the Israelites the Ten Commandments, He meant business. The Fourth Commandment, honor your father and mother, means not just that young kids ought to do what their parents tell them, but that adult children should provide for the financial needs of aging parents, assuring they live out their declining years in honor and dignity. But the Pharisees found a religious custom that absolved them from this weighty responsibility. They "dedicated" their money to God and thereby "protected" it from being able to be used to support their needy parents.



It's not the tradition that's the problem here, but the deviousness of the human heart that will use piety as an excuse to evade the obligations of true religion, which include, our second reading tells us, looking after orphans and widows and presumably elderly relatives in their distress (Jas 1:27).

And this is exactly Jesus' point in this Sunday's gospel. The kinds of foods we eat don't make us spiritually impure. No, it is the foul things that come out of the deep recesses of the human heart, wounded by original sin, that separate us from God and each other and lead to all the misery in this world.

The Pharisees thought they'd purify Israel through dietary laws and religious customs. Protestant Reformers of the 16th century thought they could purify the church by leaving behind ecclesiastical traditions and customs. History has proven both endeavors to be futile.

The answer is simple. Let's just commit ourselves to radical obedience to God's Word. Let's admit our need, our sinfulness, our tendency to make excuses, and humbly, genuinely lay open our lives and hearts before God's word and listen. As Moses tells us in Deuteronomy (4:1-8) and James tells us in his letter, let's do more than listen. Let's really hear and obey. Let's give ourselves no wiggle room, but act on God's word, regardless of how much it may cost us.



This was originally published in the Sept, 2006 edition of Our Sunday Visitor as a reflection upon the readings for the 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time, liturgical cycle B (Deut 4: 1-8; Ps 15; Jas 1:17-27; Mk 7:1-23). It is reproduced here with the permission of the author.



The Great Adventure Bible Time Line

Now you can have Jeff Cavins as your personal Bible teacher in this one-of-a-kind audio CD or Video series. This series offers a compelling overview of God's plan of salvation. Beginning with the first talk, you will discover how the Bible Time Line system developed by Jeff Cavins answers many of the questions we all have about the people, places and events of the Bible. Once you understand the "big picture" of God's plan of salvation—and where the various biblical characters fit in this overall story—you develop a new appreciation for the Scriptures. Your understanding of the Scripture readings at Mass will truly come alive. Begin the journey today. Order your full set of 24 talks for your personal study, or for RCIA or other adult faith formation class!