

## 2018 22<sup>ND</sup> SUNDAY

Until about 1965 the most important rule Catholics had- short of the obligation to attend Mass every Sunday- was the law prohibiting the eating of meat on Fridays.

On Fridays you could eat lobster, but not mince. You could relax with a beer and a meal of fish and chips but you committed a serious sin if you included a hamburger with your meal. It was not a good law. It complicated life and had few redeeming features. And so it was done away with. Pope Paul VI rescinded the no-meat on Friday law and everyone breathed a sigh of relief.

The justification for any law should be that the law protects a significant good. The laws that we have demanding that we wear seatbelts in our cars, keep the speed limit and do not drink and drive are good laws because they have a serious reason- the protection of lives on the road.

Within the Church the only justification for a law is whether or not it protects a significant good and prevents us from taking a path which would lead us away from God. Does the law lead us to holiness? If it does, it is a good law.

In Jesus' day the People of Israel had a huge catalogue of laws concerning the washing of hands and arms before and during eating. It was all such a terrible waste of spiritual energy and Jesus recognised this. For Jesus it was not clean fingernails, or clean teeth or clean skin that made a person clean in the sight of God. To be truly clean was to be clean of heart. To be clean of heart was to be forgiving, compassionate and generous.

At the beginning of His ministry Jesus said: "Set your hearts first on the Kingdom of God". It was Jesus' belief that holiness comes when people's hearts are centred on God. Holiness does not come from slavishly following a world of endless regulations.

To have hearts for Jesus; to embrace and live out His values is our real business as Christians.

And this is very much at the centre of much of the tension in the Vatican these days. As we have heard during the week, a powerful Archbishop who has been heavily involved in Vatican and world politics, has publicly accused Pope Francis of knowing about the immoral actions of an American Cardinal but not expelling him from the College of Cardinals.

The crimes the Cardinal is alleged to have committed are not illegal in the US so there is no question of police being involved. However what the Cardinal did was a gross misuse of power and horrendously sinful in the eyes of God.

We do not know the truth of the Archbishop's accusation against Pope Francis. But several commentators have noted that the Archbishop is very conservative and for many years has been highly critical of Pope Francis' papacy. The Archbishop has had engrained into him the need for the Church to stand strong against all immorality and to punish it. Pope Francis, while he abominates immorality, has a merciful heart. He hates sin but loves the sinner and will forgive the sinner if there is clear repentance. I have been told that in the Vatican there is significant opposition to the Pope because he is perceived as being soft on sin and the Archbishop is part of a faction who want to be rid of him.

It would appear as if the same battle was waged in Our Lord's time between the Pharisees and Jesus.

In the interests of upholding the 6<sup>th</sup> Commandment, the Pharisees were all too happy to stone to death the woman caught in adultery. Jesus, on the other hand, forgave the woman of her sin of adultery and sent her home with the words: "Go and sin no more."

Like Jesus, Pope Francis sees the heart of the sinner. And where there is repentance, he forgives, as Jesus did. Where there is no repentance, Pope Francis, like Jesus, acts sternly.

Jesus could see no mercy in the hearts of the Pharisees and made it clear to his listeners that the Pharisees did not reflect the heart of God.

Who better reflects the heart of Jesus- Pope Francis or this unfortunate Archbishop?

What is happening at the Vatican is hugely important. In days to come, will the Church have the mind-set of the Pharisees or will it embrace the Heart of Jesus?

A good number of Catholics were ever-so much happier as Catholics when Pope St John Paul was Pope than they are now with Pope Francis.

God did not make a mistake in inspiring the Cardinals to vote for Pope Francis. I believe it to be God's will that Pope Francis prod the church to more radically reflect the Heart of His Son?

These are difficult days. We must pray for our Church. We must especially pray that God will gift Pope Francis, his Vatican colleagues and the Bishops of the World with ever greater Wisdom.