

Lesson 15. . . Jesus Encounters Traditional Problems
Gospel of Matthew



Notes From the Podium
By Fr. Matthew Kauth

***These notes are intended to augment your own reading and study of the lesson.
Please use as an aid to help document the main message of the lecture.***

Matthew 15:1-39

- I. “Why do your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders?”
- A. So the Pharisees and the scribes get together and travel all that way to see him and the best they can come up with is “why do your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders?”
 - B. By doing what? Not washing their hands before they eat
- II. “And why do you transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?”
- A. Presently there is often a sort of visceral reaction against tradition
 - B. There is a difference between sacred tradition and customs
 - 1. Sacred Tradition is infallible
 - 2. Customs come down from tradition.
 - a. Beliefs create the culture, and that culture develops customs.
 - b. Customs are the ways of making incarnate the things that we believe.
 - i. Unfortunately the customs can become detached from the Tradition.
 - ii. The piñata actually was originally an Italian custom, a game played before and during Lent. You had to blindfold yourself in the arena of faith and hit a hideous beast, i.e. Satan, because you are going into Lent to do battle against him. The reward of such warfare was graces, symbolized by the candy that comes falling out of the piñata.
 - 3. Tradition as that which is handed over, “paradidomi” (Greek).
 - i. Christ is the one who is handed over, handed over to us.
 - ii. Christ is in himself the living Tradition.
 - 4. When customs which are for the sake of that living Tradition, which is Christ, get detached and take on a greater life than the Tradition Himself, then we have forgotten what it is we are doing and that which is most important.
 - C. Our Lord is not doing is condemning tradition.
 - 1. Often this passage is used to condemn the Tradition of the church
 - 2. On the contrary it serves to bring us back to the genuine tradition.



Notes From the Podium (cont)

III. For God commanded, ‘Honor your Father and your mother,...So, for the sake of your tradition, you have made void the word of God. You hypocrites!’

A. ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.’

B. “Korban” (Hebrew word for “gift”)

1. If one were to give over gifts to the temple treasury, then he did not have to support his parents in old age.
2. This was a transgression of the natural law, to honor our mother and father.
3. This became a custom contrary to the very heart of the law.

IV. The Pharisees and scribes attack our Lord for things that are external.

A. We often desire to find evil in the external world.

1. Gnostic - material things = evil; spiritual things = good
2. In actuality the exact opposite is true.
 - a. Material things cannot be evil
 - i. Cocaine, wine, beer, liquor, in and of themselves are not evil.
 - ii. There’s nothing evil about the body
 - b. Our Lord once looked at all of these things and said, “They are good.”
 - i. Matter is good insofar as it exists.
 - ii. Evil is not to be found in matter.
3. We want to find evil in matter because then all we have to do is change our environment.
4. If evil is in the environment, the structures, the “system” well then we just change the system and once we find the right system we can create a paradise on earth.

B. There are certain structures of evil

1. There are incarnate ideologies that are systems of evil and that propagate evil.
2. But evil is in the interior, in the heart of man, and not in the exterior world.
3. Morality is only an issue when persons are involved.

C. “...not what goes into the mouth defiles a man, but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man.”

1. The Pharisees were offended at this.
2. “Every plant which my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up.”
 - a. Jesus has just told them they are like weeds and d will be uprooted.
 - b. They teach as doctrines what are only the customs of men.



Notes From the Podium (cont)

3. "...they are blind guides. And if a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit."
 - D. There is no parable here.
 1. "Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and so passes on?"
 - a. Our Lord is very graphic with the description of consumption and process of elimination.
 - b. He does so to make us realize that this is not something that is evil; this just comes from being a creature.
 - i. You're not an angel.
 - ii. To *hide* this reality is a good thing because we aspire to something more.
 - iii. To *deny* it is contrary to humanity.
 - c. Things that are base and vulgar do not need to be brought into the public forum but they're not evil.
 2. Things that are evil sit in the recesses of the human heart and come out of the mouth.
 - a. Our desires are often displayed when we speak so often.
 - b. "But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a man;"
 - c. "...to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man."
- V. Jesus withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon.
 - A. Outside of the realm of Herod the tetrarch
 - B. Gentile country and
 - C. Out of reach of attacks from Herod, the Pharisees or scribes.
 - D. He is now concentrating on the disciples and their teaching.
- VI. A Canaanite Woman
 - A. "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David."
 1. This woman is not a Jew, nor a woman of faith and yet she calls Him "Lord" and "Son of David" (Messiah).
 2. She says to him what the Pharisees and the scribes just a moment ago would not.
 - B. "My daughter is severely possessed by a demon."
 1. It is the love for her daughter that drives this woman to our lord.
 2. We are so used to hearing our Lord called "Lord" and "Son of David" that we miss the fact that it is on the lips of a Gentile.
 3. The love for her daughter is going to change into a love for him



Notes From the Podium (cont)

- a. Our Lord does more than simply grant her request.
- b. He wants more for her; He wants Himself for her.
4. Silence
 - a. Often the response from heaven seems to be silence.
 - b. Silence converts the soul; silence drives someone to humility and the realization that we can't do things on our own.
 - c. Silence changes the mind and offers fertile soil to our Lord, because we wait on Him and become more and more receptive to an answer.
 - d. Unresponsiveness is terribly disrespectful and seems uncaring.
 - i. The Son of God cannot be oblivious, cannot be indifferent.
 - ii. If He is silent, it means something, because He can't remain silent in the face of the cry of a human person.
5. "And his disciples came and begged him, saying, "Send her away, for she is crying after us."
 - a. They pray to be delivered of this woman.
 - b. They would rather that our Lord use His power to just to grant her request.
 - c. They are not interested in her.
 - d. They're interested in their own quiet, *just give her what she wants and she'll go away.*
6. Often when we intercede for other people, our Lord will string us along it seems.
 - a. He wants more than to just giving us what we are requesting; He wants us.
 - b. When other persons are in suffering and our love for them drives us to our knees to intercede for them there is a two fold effect.
 - i. You may very well receive the grace you're asking for.
 - ii. You are in conversation with our Lord, and that's what He wants above all things.
 - iii. He can grant the gift, that's nothing, what he wants is you.
7. But the disciples don't want her.
 - a. Our Lord doesn't answer the woman yet, instead He speaks to the prayer intention of the disciples," I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."
 - i. As if to say: *I'm not going to grant her what she's asking because she's a Gentile, and not one of my flock. Would you, who are Jews, want me to do that?*
 - ii. The disciples don't realize it but in some ways they're praying for that catholicity, they're praying for that universality.
 - iii. This is exactly what the disciples will have to do.



Notes From the Podium (cont)

- b. Peter, Paul and all of the apostles will be sent not only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel but to all the world to dispense these gifts.
8. But she came and knelt before him, saying...
 - a. She assumes the posture of a servant, of humility, before her Lord.
 - b. Her body speaks now more than her tongue.
 - c. “Lord, help me.”
 - i. A perfect prayer
 - ii. A prayer made more with the knees than with the tongue.
9. “It is not fair to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.”
 - a. He uses the term that’s a diminutive for little dogs (to use a diminutive form of a word often conveys affection or intimacy)
 - b. She responds, “nai, nai kyrie”, yes, oh Lord, you are right, I am a little dog and I’m *your* little dog.
 - i. Even if she’s just a little dog, she’s His and He’s got to feed her, He has to take care of her.
 - ii. As if to say, you *are mine and I am yours*. You are the master and I’m your little dog.
 - iii. She’s excited, to belong to him, which is of course is exactly what He wants.
10. “O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.”
 - a. He doesn’t even say let your daughter be relieved of the demon.
 - b. The daughter is not really what’s at issue here.
 - c. “Let it be done for you as you desire.”
11. What is it that you desire?
 - a. A desire now even more magnified, a desire:
 - i. Not only for her daughter
 - ii. Not only to be part of His household like a little dog eating little scraps under the table
 - b. A desire to be one of the children at the table.
 - c. “Let it be done for you as you desire.”
12. And almost as a footnote it says, “And her daughter was healed instantly.”
13. This entire thing is a lover’s tryst, that goes back and forth
 - a. Our Lord desires a relationship with us.
 - b. Not a relationship where we simply ask and intercede because we want things.
 - c. He will make us labor until finally the desires of the heart change according to that which we fundamentally do all desire and that is to be His own.



Notes From the Podium (cont)

- VII. “I have compassion on the crowd...and I am unwilling to send them away hungry...”
- A. Again compassion is stirred inside of Him.
 - B. The disciples said, “Where are we to get bread enough in the desert to feed so great a crowd?”
 - 1. Jesus asks, “How many loaves have you?”
 - 2. They said, “Seven, and a few small fish.”
 - 3. “And commanding the crowd to sit down on the ground, he took the seven loaves and the fish, and having given thanks he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds.”
 - 4. This is Gentile territory and this is a sign.
 - a. Recall the feeding of the 5000 and the 12 baskets that were left.
 - b. Almost all of the same language is used, except a different word for gathering up the fragments.
 - c. He’s going to feed not only the children but the little dogs as well and raise them up to be His children, His beloved.
 - 5. “And they all ate and were satisfied; and they took up *seven* baskets,”
 - a. “Seven” is the number of perfection
 - b. The covenant complete; the whole world,
 - c. Seven baskets full of the broken pieces, the *klasmata*
 - 6. “Those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children. And sending away the crowds, he got into the boat and went to the region of Magadan.”

I.