

*Good morning everyone,*

*After a few Sundays of excursion into the Gospel of John (and Luke for the festival of Mary), we return this Sunday, the Thirteenth after Trinity, to the Gospel of Mark, the principal Gospel of this Year B in our liturgical cycle. This week we reflect on a common theme in the Christian life, the balance between law and love. We consider how our obedience to the word of God should never become a mechanical compliance. God is a God who loves us and wants to be near to his people. If we respond to that love it has to be a response from the heart.*

#### **Deuteronomy 4: 1 – 2 & 6 – 9**

Deuteronomy means ‘second law.’ The book is the foundation document for a whole view of Israel’s history from the Book of Joshua to the end of the Second Book of Kings (‘the Deuteronomic History’). It purports to be the final ‘Book of Moses’ but in its present form it is much later than him and gives indications of the state of the nation towards the end of the monarchy and into the Exile (from 597BC). The Deuteronomic theme highlights faithfulness to the covenant with God as bringing peace and prosperity, and infidelity as the cause of failure and punishment, drawing Israel back to repentance and God’s forgiveness. Our short passage aptly reflects this theme.

The people are called to obey God’s law as a response to what God has done for them. Their life in the promised land would depend on their faithfulness to God and would be a witness to neighbouring nations of the goodness of the laws God had given. As Christians we are faced with similar choices. We are not to be a people who simply follow written codes and teachings, but who live in response to God’s love as shown chiefly in the person of Jesus Christ. Authentic Christian living is also the single most effective witness and mission statement the Church possesses. To paraphrase St Theresa of Avila, ‘We ourselves are the only Bible this careless world will read.’

#### **James 1: 17 – 27**

The letter of James is very practical. Christians are to be doers of the word of God, not simply listeners, a message that is frequently repeated throughout the New Testament. Our personal relationship with God cannot be separated from our behaviour, our deeds. A revolution of heart is needed to allow the word of God, already planted in us, to grow and reveal itself in our lives. Christianity is not just a matter of believing ‘the right things,’ not just a matter of trying ‘to do good.’ It includes both but it is more than that. Our faith is authenticated in our doing good; our doing good comes from knowing that God loves us, and everybody else too.

#### **Mark 7: 1 – 8, 14 – 15 & 21 – 23**

This passage exposes the great hypocrisy that can emerge in and damage all religion. Customs, rules, rituals which once began with good intentions as a sign of holiness of living, can become ends in themselves, and eventually lack all spiritual meaning and value, completely obscuring their original purpose.

Jesus shows that obedience to God involves a radical commitment affecting the whole of our life. He does not attack traditions but appeals for them to be observed with the right perspective and motive so that they demonstrate our relationship with God rather than hinder it.

A prayer for this Sunday:

*Father, God of the ever-new covenant, you have tied us to yourself with leading strings of lasting love; the words you speak to us are spirit and life. Open our hearts to your words, that they may touch us in our deepest selves. May they move us to serve you not in a slavish or mechanical way but as your children who love you and whom you have set free through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

*I hope these reflections are proving to be a helpful part of your preparation for Sunday worship. They will be paused for the next few Sundays while I take my holiday. I hope to resume them from the beginning of October.*

*Wishing you a happy Sunday with every blessing for the week ahead.*

*Love and prayers,*

*John*