

GOSPEL MESSAGE

September 1, 2024

LECTIONARY 22

What Would Jesus Do?

At the outset, rules seem simple. They divide the world into good and bad and help us restore a measure of order to a chaotic world. Unfortunately, the same rules that we use to bring order out of chaos are often insufficient to deal with the complexity of our lives, which is one of the reasons there truly is an exception to every rule. This is also the reason we appoint judges: to interpret the law when it fails to adequately address the circumstance to which it is applied.

In Jesus' day the Pharisees and scribes were known for their strict observance of the law. So when they notice the disciples of Jesus eating with defiled hands, the Pharisees and scribes bring this perceived breach of the law to Jesus' attention. The law itself, which requires that people wash their hands before eating, originated from ancient purity laws. Jesus understands this and simultaneously upholds and reframes the law by drawing his listeners' attention away from the washing of hands to what truly defiles. In doing so, Jesus acts as a judge and offers an interpretation of the law that both upholds its original intent of purity and absolves the disciples of wrongdoing. At the same time, he exposes the prioritization of human precepts over God's command and reminds us of God's sovereignty and compassion.

Rules are simple, but our world is not. Through the incarnation, the Word made flesh, God meets us at the intersection of law and life. In Jesus, God the judge enters our world in a new way and interprets the law. And through Jesus, we come to understand God's will in a messy world. Therefore, if we as Christians truly want to live out the will of God, we do well to start with that old and simple question "What would Jesus do?"

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