

Our readings today point to 3 things

Who God is

And our relationship with Him

The truth of religious practices

And how we live them when they take root in our lives

Our first reading comes from Deuteronomy

A book written by Moses

Here he has called an assembly

He has summoned them

**Similar to the words we hear in the newly translated Eucharistic
prayer**

Where we call out to God:

Listen graciously to the prayers of this family

Whom you have summoned before you

In your compassion, O merciful Father

Gather to yourself all your children

Scattered throughout the world

It is with similar words that Moses would call an assembly

In our reading today

The assembly is called to receive a proclamation

Not from Moses

But through Moses from God

To hear the statutes and decrees of the Lord

These are permanent things

Chiseled into stone

Blessings from God

But these blessings could be lost

They require a response from God's chosen people

Obedience to his commands

They would be a light to the nations

The fact that God had chosen them

The laws and decrees God has given them

And they would give evidence of their wisdom and intelligence

Not by going their own way

Not by filling their lives with pride

But by humbly obeying God's commands

For their own sake

And for the sake of the entire world

Living these commands becomes concrete in our lives over time

We apply these in our rituals and liturgies

In our reading from James

We begin by recognizing all good gifts come from God

All good gifts in our personal life

And in our lives in general

Peace and prosperity

A sense of security and fulfillment

Knowledge of God and religious insight

Even the law itself is a gift to guide us to eternal life

These gifts are constant

Like the light of the sun and stars

Another of God's gifts is our religious nature

The word is planted in our soul

We are called to welcome that word

And make it grow by putting it into practice

Helping to spread it to others

We put them into practice

We proclaim the Gospel by how we live the word

In our Gospel, the scribes and Pharisees come to Jesus

They are not complaining directly about him

But they attack him through his disciples

We have our law from Moses

Why don't your disciples follow the Law of Moses?

They were trying to discredit the apostles

And thus discredit Jesus

This is not a critique on general hygiene

More of a symbolic washing

Similar to the priest washing his hand before the consecration

But Jesus responds directly to them

Hypocrites

This people honors me with their lips

But their hearts are far from me

The practice of our faith is not about fulfilling external laws

It is about our hearts

It is about our relationship with God

Flowing from that, we will fulfill the law

Not out of fear of the law

But out of love for God

So what does this mean for us today?

We all have traditions

Whether they are secular or religious

Or whether they are a mixture

Our traditions tell who we are

They give us our identity

We have family traditions

Things that make us who we are

Things that might make others think we are nuts

Things we do on birthdays or anniversaries

At Christmas or at Easter

Things we do in our professional lives

We have national traditions

Fireworks on July 4th

Dropping a ball or a carp on New Years

Cookouts for Memorial Day or Labor Day

Parades

We have religious traditions

Do you know what a fish eater is?

Anyone over a certain age does

Jews eating Kosher food

Crucifixes and paintings of saints in our homes and churches

Not to worship them

But to remind us of Christ

And our relationship with him

We need traditions in our lives

Wearing a shirt with a big W or a G on it is important

It expresses a connection with a team

But more important is wearing something that connects us to God

Attending Sunday Mass, or weekday if we can

Medals or scapulars

Rosaries or crucifixes in our homes

Visible expressions of our Catholic identity

But we have to intentionally keep one thing in mind

Why do we have these things?

Why do we do these things?

Because they can become secularized very easily

It can be easy to have a St Christopher medal in the car

And drive under the influence

Using a rosary for a necklace or for decoration

We can say the words to our prayers

And forget to pray

Dipping our hand into holy water and making the sign of the cross

Is this just a routine?

**Or do we recall our baptism and the blood and water that
flowed from Christ's side?**

**Is the sacrament of reconciliation or the Eucharist a call to inner
conversion?**

Or are they a way to keep the law externally?

It is about the heart

Where we are in our relationship with God

The words of God's covenant are very much alive in the world today

Fidelity to the covenant is shown externally

But it is lived in the heart

We are religious by nature

We need traditions to connect us with this reality

We are matter and spirit

We need concrete actions that reflect spiritual realities

That is where the Word leads us

When it has taken root in our lives

It opens our hearts to the wonder and mystery of creation

It brings us to the source of all things

To the giver of all good gifts

To enrich our lives

For our families and loved ones

For the Church

For the world