

## 22B

*In a certain monastery when the monks assembled in the chapel for Vespers the monastery cat would get in the way and distract the monks from prayer. So the abbot ordered that the cat be tied up in the chapel during evening prayer. After the abbot died, the cat continued to be tied up during evening prayer. And when that cat died, another cat was fetched so that it could also be tied up during evening prayer. Many centuries later a cat was still being tied up as part of the ritual and none of the monks knew exactly why.*

They say 'old habits die hard'. The same could apply to outmoded customs. By being preoccupied with tying up the cat the monks were distracted from their evening prayer which should have been the priority. Last Sunday I spoke about marriage. For some the attractiveness of the church building for a wedding often seems to take precedence over the religious aspect of the event. We could say some marry at the Church whilst others marry in the church. Big difference between the two. If we're strangers to the mass, for instance, then the church becomes little more than a glorified registry office.

The Pharisees had invented all sorts of peculiar customs which barred the people from eating certain foods regarded by them as unclean. Jesus takes issue with them and declares that it's not what goes into our stomach that makes us unclean but what comes out of our heart which does the damage. Some parents, for instance are very careful about what their children eat but don't seem as concerned about harmful things they look at on the internet or social media. Some religions have somewhat quaint customs about foods they're forbidden to eat whether it be pork, or beef or whatever but according to the Acts of the Apostles all foods are clean. It doesn't make the slightest difference to one's spiritual welfare what meat you eat provided you don't eat too much of it.

Applying this to our faith the danger is we could get carried away with the externals of our religion or worse still, even use them to reinforce our prejudices. The Pharisees did a lot for show and hence were quick to condemn those who didn't adhere to their man-made customs and Jesus told them as much. For them the custom of washing hands before and after meals was more important than being clean within, precisely what they were not. In the weekday readings last week Jesus compared them to whitewashed tombs which look good from the outside but are full of corruption within.

Being clean within will mean there is a correlation between our outward worship of God and what's going on in the depths of our hearts. Otherwise our worship of God is mere lip-service.

*Jesus says: 'it's what comes out of a person's heart which makes him or her unclean' because it is from the heart that evil intentions emerge such as deceit, indecency, envy and slander to name but a few. But the opposite is also true. What makes us clean on the inside is heartfelt love for God and neighbour. This makes our worship of God genuine and sincere.*