

## Religious practice v Spirituality

*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 the cat died, another cat was fetched so that it could also be tied up during evening prayer. Centuries later learned treatises were written by the learned monks on the liturgical significance of tying up a cat during Vespers.*

We could become slaves to doing things a certain way and not knowing why we are doing them. This is especially true when it comes to religious rituals. Last week I spoke about marriage and related issues. This is an area where tradition could take precedence over a living faith. For instance some seem to marry at the Church, in line with family tradition while others marry in the church. The Church is the family of God and if we have distanced ourselves from that family then the church becomes little more than a building, pretty and all as it might be. But when we're part of that family it makes all the difference.

The Pharisees had invented all sorts of peculiar customs which prevented the people from eating certain foods regarded by them as unclean. Jesus takes issue with them and their man-made rules and declares it's not what goes into the stomach of a man or woman that makes them unclean but the malicious intentions which come out of their hearts which does the damage.

We could get so caught up with the externals of religion or worse still even use religion to reinforce our prejudices. Jesus accused the Pharisees of putting aside the commandments of God which required them to love God and their neighbour and reproached them for clinging to traditions which made them feel that were a cut above everyone else. Jesus brought them down to earth with a bang. They put love of the law ahead of the law of love. Hence they had no compassion for the uphill strugglers of their day and Jesus told them as much. For them washing hands was more important than being clean within. We could be tainted with this way of thinking as well.

Being clean within will mean we worship God in spirit and in truth. Genuine piety involves the whole person where body, mind and heart are engaged – it's not mere lip-service.

*Jesus says today: 'it's what comes out of a person's heart which makes him or her unclean' because it from there that those sinister intentions emerge. But the opposite is also true. We are asked to love God with all our heart and not settle for anything less.*

## **Questions**

*Q1. Some spiritual guru once said that a sign of spiritual growth is having the ability to think the unfamiliar. Do we keep people from church by becoming too boring and predictable in all aspects of our lives even religious? Discuss with the group.*

*Q2. Some people marry 'at the church'; others marry 'in the church'. Discuss with the group.*

*Q3. In the Catholic Church have we emphasised too much 'the practice of our faith at the expense of church-going people developing a deeper spiritual life? Discuss with the group.*

*Q4. Chopping and changing things too often can put people off especially in the Mass. Discuss with the group.*

*Q5. Why do so many young people 'drop church' after they get confirmed. Has the church itself something to answer for here by not seriously engaging with the younger generation? Discuss with the group.*