

JESUS AND SACRED RITES AND RITUALS

*These notes are taken from the book “To Be Like Jesus” of P. Ribes, s.j
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GOSPEL STUDY

- ✓ *The purpose of this Gospel Study is to discover the mind of Jesus concerning religious rites and rituals.*
- ✓ *We have to put on the attitudes of Jesus in the practice of faith.*
- ✓ *These jottings may help us get rid of distorted ideas, compulsions, scruples and punctiliousness in the practice of our sacramental rites as well as of other religious practices and devotions*
- ✓ *If we go through The Gospels we discover that nearly all the clashes between Jesus and the Pharisees were clashes over rituals!*
- ✓ *One of the root causes of Jesus condemnation and even of his death on the cross can easily be ascribed to the incompatibility of Jesus’ and the Pharisees’ views on the practice of religious rites and rituals.*

Starter

- We quote below some N.T. Texts where serious clashes between Jesus and the Pharisees are clearly seen.
- Read very carefully the texts referred to.
- Reflect on each of them and identify what was the issue that sparked an argument between Jesus and the Pharisees.
- Next, reply – *better writing a few jottings* – to the following questions:

Question for Reflection

1. What was the point or the issue Jesus and the Pharisees argued about?
2. What was the attitude of Jesus and the one of the Pharisees regarding that issue?
3. From the clash of attitudes what can we learn for ourselves to improve our Christian religious practices?

N.T. Under Study

Texts showing a clash of mentalities between Jesus and the Pharisees

1. Teaching of the Ancestors. (Mt 15:1-9)
2. Sabbath was made for man, not Man for the Sabbath. (Mk 2:23-27)
3. Things that make a person unclean. (Mk 7:14-23)
4. The call of Matthew. (Lk 5:27-32)
5. Questions about fasting. (Lk 5:33-35)
6. Questions about the Sabbath. (Mt 6:1-5)
7. Jesus heals a man with a crippled hand on a Sabbath. (Lk 6:6-11)
8. Washing hands and other rites (Lk 11:37-42.
9. Healing a crippled woman on a Sabbath. (Lk 13:10-17)
10. Healing a sick man on a Sabbath. (Lk 14:1-6)

11. Healing a blind man on a Sabbath.

(Jn 9:1-41)

CONCLUSIONS:

Conclusion One: The Basic Attitude of Jesus towards Religious Rituals was One of Respect, not Idolatry.

N.T. Texts:

He did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets nor do away with religious rituals and practices but to perfect them.

- “When the time was ripe, God sent his own Son. He came as the son of a human mother, and lived under the Jewish law. So that we might become Gods children”(Galatians(4:4-5)
- “Do not think that I have come to do away with the Law of Moses and the teachings of the Prophets. I have not come to do away with them but to make their teaching come true”(Mt 5:17-18)

Instances in the life of Jesus where we see Him Respecting the Religious Rituals of the Jewish People.

- The naming and circumcision of Jesus. His Parents followed all the rites and customs of the Jews. (Lk 2:22)
- Jesus was presented in the temple “When they finished doing all that was required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee.” (Lk 2:22-24 &39)
- Jesus goes to the temple of Jerusalem when he was 12 years old. (Lk 2:41-52)
- Jesus goes up to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover. (Jn 2:13)
- Jesus goes up to Jerusalem again for the feast of the Tabernacles. (Jn 7: 10 & 14)
- Jesus goes up to Jerusalem once again for feast of the Dedication. (Jn 10:22-23)
- Jesus tells the man cured of leprosy to observe the ritual of going and presenting himself to the priests and offering sacrifice. (Lk 5: 12-14)
- Jesus pays the temple tax as any ordinary Jew. (Mt 17: 14-27)
- Jesus gets ready for the last Passover meal. (Lk 22: 7-13)
- Jesus eats his last ritual Passover meal. (Jn 12: 12-13)

Conclusion Two: Nevertheless, Jesus Steered Clear of the Dangers and Pitfalls arising from Religious Rituals.

N.T. Texts:

Jesus’ statements about the relativity of external rites and observances.

“The Sabbath was made for the good of man; man was not made for the Sabbath”(Mk 2:27)

“It is not what goes into a person’s mouth that makes him unclean but rather what comes from his mouth that makes him unclean.” (Mt 15:11)

Instances in the life of Jesus where we see Him braking away from old rites and rituals

- In our relationship with God and in judging the worth of any ritual the only absolute values are God and man. (Lk 13:10-17 & Mt 15:1-9)
- In the Last Judgment, we shall be judged not by the way we stuck to rites and outer observances, but by the way we loved God and neighbour. (Mt 25/31-46)
- Jesus enjoyed freedom in the proper use of rites and rituals; he did not allow himself to be used by them. (Lk 5:33-35 & 6:1-5)
- He had no qualms of conscience about healing people on a Sabbath, even if he had to incur the displeasure of the authorities. (Lk 6:6-11)
- We have to respect religious rites and rituals, but not at the cost of human dignity or in detriment of our fellowmen. (Lk 14: 1-6)

LESSONS WE LEARNED FROM JESUS.

- He always adhered to the spirit, not necessarily to the letter of the law.
- He did not “sacralise”, “objectify”, “absolutize or “idolize”, rites and rituals.
- He did not use them to escape reality or to substitute ritual for duty.
- He even respected “the persons” who did not practice the laws and rites of the Jews.
- He could not stand empty ritualism or the mumbo-jumbo of formulae.

Jesus Preached Honesty and Sincerity in the Practice of Religion and Rituals.

- Jesus warns us very sternly against the dangers of the mere outward observance of rites and rituals. (Mt 23:1-12)
- Jesus condemns all hypocrisy, duplicity and insincerity in ritual prayers and in the observances of the law. (Mt 23:13-28)
- Jesus teaches what true worship is. We should not link worship to purely legalistic, ritualistic and ceremonial considerations of place, time and lifestyle. God has to be worshipped in spirit and in truth overriding all other considerations. (Jn 4: 16-24)
- In the parable of the Publican and the Pharisee, Jesus teaches that our relationship with God does not lie only in keeping all the laws and regulations and religious practice but in an inner disposition rooted in honesty and truth.(Lk 18:9-14)
- We have to approach God with our hearts, not with our lips. (Mt 7:1-8)

PRACTICAL CONSEQUENCES

1. When rites or rituals, in particular circumstances, go against any human rights or dignity they stand abrogated. They do not serve their purpose any longer.
2. Dishonouring rites, rituals and other revered religious practices without proportionate reason is wrong. It betrays an immature and adolescent attitude of misplaced anger and of resistance to lawful authority.

3. Submitting oneself blindly to any rite or ritual which is meaningless, irrelevant, humiliating or even against human dignity is a sign of childish compliance and a lack of self-esteem, assertiveness and strength of character.
4. If ever any religious practice is felt to be bereft of meaning, one has to make an honest effort to find the meaning it surely has or had. However, if after an honest search, no meaning is found, a person in good conscience could discontinue it.
5. We have to treasure our freedom of conscience – properly understood - in the practice of religion. - *Freedom of conscience does not mean freedom to do what one likes or wishes,, but freedom to do what one thinks is the right thing to do.*
6. Rubrics, liturgies and sacraments are helps, not hindrances! They are made for man; not man for them

APPENDIX

Suggested Activities in Case of Group Events

Working on New Testament Passages

The passages quoted above can be presented in an active, dynamic and dramatic way.

- ✓ By acting or miming.
- ✓ As Radio Plays (the scripts can be put on tape and played back)
- ✓ Or also as puppet shows or a shadow plays.

Working on Real Life situations.

- ✓ The group members will recall some incidents of their lives where a clash between ritual and individual conscience was apparent.
- ✓ The group will choose one of those incidents and present it to the house.
- ✓ The manner of presentation is left to the participants.

Role-playing Imaginary Conflicting Situations.

- ✓ The group will imagine a conflicting situation and role-play it.
- ✓ The situation could be a transposition to a modern setting. of one of the conflicting situations found in the Gospel between Jesus and the Pharisees

Fantasies: “If Jesus were to come today”

- ✓ If Jesus were to come today to our world, to our churches or to our homes and were asked to conform to our religious rites and rituals, or to our sacramental practices, or to our ecclesiastical protocol, or to our pious practices and devotions, what would He have to say?
- ✓ Would there confrontations arise between Him and us: parents, superiors, parish priests, bishops, etc? Imagine them. Act them.

Slogans Contest

- Ask the groups to quote sentences taken from the Gospels or from other parts of the Scriptures, - Old and New Testaments - on rites and rituals. For instance.
 - “Sabbath is meant for Man, not man for the Sabbath”
 - “The letter kills, the spirit vivifies”
- The group that cites the largest number of quotes will win the contest.

Graphic Arts

Request the group to express through some graphic means the key ideas of the event.

For instance:

Posters

Murals

Collages

Cuttings from magazines, photos, etc

Comic Strips.

Cartoons