

There's so much more to a good holiday than just rest and relaxation, eating and drinking too much and coming home with a good suntan. A really good holiday is about rediscovering your inner sense of freedom. Freedom from routine, freedom from whatever work we normally have to do, freedom indeed to actually do very little, a little opening into a totally different world; a vision, if you like, of what life could be like.

Now let's look at today's gospel. Here we have presented to us two very different ways of doing religion. First, is the way of duty and obligation, obedience and doing what we are told, following the traditions of our family and our forebears, doing what our clergy and our teachers tell us. The second is the way of the heart, the way of love. The Scribes and the Pharisees represent the first, with all their very primitive regulations about washing pots and washing hands right up to the elbow. Jesus and his disciples represent the second, knowing God and his commandments from the inside rather than the outside. Or, as St James puts it in the second reading, coming to the help of widows and orphans and accepting and submitting to the word which has been planted deep within our souls, and not just some external word given to us by somebody else but that deeply personal word which is unique and special to each one of us.

Where are we in all this – the way of obligations or the way of the heart? Life, of course, cannot be a perpetual holiday. We need rules and regulations. We need routines. The freedom Jesus offers is not a freedom simply to do as we please. The freedom to love from the depth of our hearts still needs guidance and direction. The freedom to love still needs a few Scribes and Pharisees to keep us on the straight and narrow.

But, and this has got to be an extremely big but, if our religion, if our way of life is to be the way of Jesus, it will always be first and foremost a matter of the heart, an invitation to live with Jesus. It will always be an opening to eternity, an opening to heaven. The way of Jesus will always take us well beyond the way of the Scribes and Pharisees from which Isaiah calls us from lip service to heart service.

The Jewish religion is sometimes portrayed as the religion par excellence of rules and regulations. *Keeping the commandments of the Lord you God just as I lay them down for you.* But the most important commandment of all, the climax of all the commandments is the commandment to Keep Holy the Day of the Sabbath, the day that God himself rests from all his labours. Like a holiday, the day of the Sabbath is not just a day of rest, not just freedom from work and routine, but sharing in the very freedom of God Himself.

I apologise if, as your priest, I sometimes behave more like a Scribe or a Pharisee, bossing you around and telling you what to do. May this Mass and every Mass that we celebrate as a parish be an opening into the love of God, an opening into heaven, a sharing in the very freedom of God, that freedom which makes it possible to love and to be loved.

