

There are two lungs from which any just law will take its breathe. The first is the letter and language chosen to communicate intent and secondly the spirit of the law which speaks without words to the heart. The book of Deuteronomy is the final of the Pentateuch or five books of Moses. Deuteronomy means, “second law” but the book is really commentary on the law already delivered from Mount Sinai. Moses aims to impress upon the Israelites, God’s call, through the letter, to more disciplined obedience. He appeals to this Nation’s past glory, their founding principles and promise for the future. This migratory nation under Moses’ command will soon cross over the Jordan River and take occupancy of a land promised them.

What will this wandering band become and how will they represent themselves? What will be the characteristics and identifying traits of this collective? Will they be great builders and artisans? Or will they be sea-farers and agriculturalists? They have reached a point in nationhood where they must adopt an identity and constitution upon which to build their emerging national governance framework. What will, or rather, Who will centre their vision?

The nation that Moses envisions will be wise and discerning and will be guided by just laws and ordinances. But advanced moral codes and a sophisticated legal system will not be enough to identify this People. This people unlike others, have elected to represent themselves in terms of their proximity to God.

Modern nations have imported pieces of this thinking. “God Save the Queen,” “In God we Trust”, “God keep our land glorious and free”. I especially love our CWL statement, for God and Canada. Using the conjunction word, “and” bonds two distinct ideas in relationship and I know the wonderful ladies of St Peter’s CWL work hard keeping these themes related and relevant.

Canadian law and its constitution, for example; protect and honour the dignity of workers. But, I imagine, we can also find gaps in the way justice across our land is carried out. The letter versus the spirit! Remember Israel’s principle identifier was evident by its nearness to God. Is our nation approaching or distancing itself from God. If it is the former we will want to celebrate and model to the world our experience, but, if we believe it is more often the later, we will want to make some urgent corrections.

And now the Pharisees and the scribes are observing Jesus and his followers, and, as is often the case, they have a problem. This time though they have a good question. Why are Jesus' people not following the traditional washing rites prescribed? There are many good reasons why washing our body and the food we consume should be carried out. These are after-all public health issues. But such are merely human ordinances of practicality and tradition. In other words they are laws regulated by the Pharisees. An aspect of civil and religious life they don't wish to surrender control. How such ordinances could be binding on Jesus, who being God, animates the highest spirit of the law? We also see in Jesus' response a loosening from these bonds of littleness and a door being opened to allow more inclusive and Gentile participation in the movement. Moral and spiritual defilement is of course, of greater concern to Jesus than bodily. The living body is a complex arrangement of systems with both inputs and outputs. We pass materials to and from our respective environments through the body. That is to say, that the body executes on sacred living processes, that both influence and are influenced, by our surroundings. Jesus call us to recognize more fully humankind's spiritual surroundings and offer in return a sacramental response.

In baptism, the body becomes the temporal dwelling place of the spirit and the instrument through which sacramental engagement is enlivened. We should care for body, as though it were the palace of the Holy Spirit. Further, we should care not only for the bodies in which our spirit dwell, but also for those of our neighbours.

And so what comes in and what goes out of the body is largely a function of sacred awareness. A technical slogan says. Garbage in; Garbage out. The problem with garbage out is that, the hateful thinking, words, and deeds Jesus mentions are processed in a manner that distances us from God and one another. Defiling elements entering the body through any of our senses are to be filtered immediately, never permitted to touch our hearts. Squelched by the Gospel and Eucharist, and never to be retransmitted. And so, Brothers and sister never lose touch with your Catholic sacramental nature which collectively demonstrates our nearness to God. Look to Jesus and to the sacraments of the Church as mileposts mapping a way ever nearer to God. Show concern for the body, but more importantly eternal life. The instruction Jesus gives today is not a licence to abuse the body. Let us be members of a great nation who model peace and justice, giving evidence that God has indeed kept our land glorious and free. Amen