

September 2, 2018 22nd Sunday in ordinary time

A husband and wife were driving down a country road on their way to visit some friends. As they came to the muddy part of the road they got stuck in a hole. After a few minutes of trying to get the car out by themselves they saw this farmer, come with oxen down the road. He said, "Oh I see you are stuck, I'll pull you out for 50 bucks." Sounds a bit greedy but what other choice? Later the car was freed. The farmer turned to the husband and said, "You know you are the 10th car I pulled out of that mudhole today. The husband looked at the fields around him and said, "Then when do you do your work, at night?" The farmer said, "Oh no, at night I fill the mudhole with water!

Our readings today are all about the law and laws and whether we followed them correctly or not. In the first reading from the book of Deuteronomy, Moses has given the people the 10 Commandments, and now he's exhorting them to follow them. And God has said follow these when you come in and take possession of the land I'm going to give you, the promised land. He said because this is going to be the most just law you've ever seen. The laws around them in the other pagan countries were not just, they were unfair. The 10 Commandments are just and fair and God says, "And, by the way, don't add anything to the 10 Commandments; don't subtract anything from the 10 Commandments." And then he said, "And they're not suggestions, they are Commandments." And he said if you follow them then the people around you are going to say, "Man those people are smart, they're intelligent and then they're going to want to become part of us. They are going to want to be able to worship Me instead of false gods. So pay attention to the 10 Commandments." In Jesus's gospel today, He is upset. The scribes and the Pharisees are nitpicking. Jews wash and purify everything; every utensil they're going to eat with gets washed and purified. Every piece of fruit that comes from the market gets washed with soap and water. Everything. And they have prayers to go along with it. And they are asking Jesus why do his disciples not do these things. Because what has happened is the Pharisees have added to the 10 Commandments. They've added 653 new laws to the 10 Commandments. They're telling the people you have to follow 663 laws every day to be holy to be righteous to be a good Jew. A lot of people gave up. Who could follow 663 laws? It's hard enough following the speed limit down Hunt Hwy. He is very upset, He's telling them, wait a minute you are telling the people that laws that you created, manmade, are more important than God's. And He said this is not so. He said you are doing the wrong thing. Now, he said they give me lip service. Well, us Catholics tend to do things that are not that important but we attach a tremendous importance to them, and we have to do them even though we really don't. One of them is when you walk in the door, Catholics look to the right and to the left. We do that on the streets so we don't get hit by a car. We look to the right then to left? "Where's the holy water?" You're lost without holy water. Is that mandatory? No. Why do you do it? Who knows why the water? "Oh, Mom and Dad taught me, Grandma taught me." Why do you do it? We did it because in the early days you wanted to know who was Catholic and wasn't. If they weren't they were probably going to kill you because everybody was persecuted. So somebody would walk into a building, put their hand in the holy water, make the sign of the cross, the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit, to remind themselves of their baptism but also to let everybody else know, "I belong here I'm not going to kill you, I'm not going to turn you in." It is one of the signs we used. And today most people just go through the motions they don't even know what the words are, or say the words. And then people add other things. (Motioning more signs) Why? Are you going to die if you don't do that? That's one of those things that are mere human precepts that will make a big deal out of. The Pharisees were laypeople, contrary to popular belief they were not religious authority they were laypeople.

When God the father led people in the promised land, and gave to the 12 tribes their own land, He created a priestly class. These priests were supposed to wash the vessels, wash their clothes, wash themselves before they went to the temple and in front of the sanctuary before God and worshiped. So you didn't bring the world, the dirt, all that. So you could be as pure as possible. That's what the priests did. And then after 500 years, the people were doing it. But God never said people had to do it and that's what the Pharisees are questioning. Why aren't you doing this? Because what happened was everyone was doing it, so they decided, let's make it a law. Why were the people doing it? Because they thought the priests were holy and they wanted to be holy too. They could have stopped any time and it wouldn't have been a problem. They were doing something mandated by laypeople, humans, that they didn't have to do. So the scribes and Pharisees are getting on Jesus's case, "Your disciples don't wash their cups before drinking out of them." Jesus could have said, "No they are not dirty, they wash them afterwards." Like we do. But he said, "No you are teaching the wrong things, you are putting emphasis on the wrong things, you are not obeying the law like you are supposed to. First, you added all those other laws to the 10 Commandments. Second, because you added them you have now made them more important than God's law. So you have to wash things and that is more important than 'thou shalt not kill?'" This is what Jesus is talking about. Why do we do things? The people in the Catholic Church watch the priest or the deacon or the bishop, come up to read the gospel and the bishop or priest or deacon made the sign of the cross on the gospel and then made it on his head, his lips and his chest. In the book, only the person reading the gospel does that. But what happened? You guys wanted to do something too. So now, you do it and you teach your kids to do it and it's not even in the book for you. You could just sit there and not do that but your mama told you or your grandma told you, so now it's got to be a law.

This lady was making a ham for New Year's Eve. She had a big pan and the ham would fit but she cut off the end and put it off to the side. Her daughter said, "Mom, why are you doing that?" "Well my mom did it." So she went and asked her mom, "Why did you do that Mom?" "Well, my Mom did it." So they go to Grandma. "Grandma, why did you cut the end off the ham?" "Because my pan wasn't big enough." Another extreme example

In Denmark there was a church until recently, for 300 years people would bow to a spot on the wall going out the door. A blank wall; people are bowing to it. Finally a tourist said, "Why?" "We were taught to bow to the wall." Going out of a Catholic Church, you bow to the wall. Why? For 300 years. Because mama said, because nana said, because papa said, whoever. Finally the church needed repairs so they took the plaster off from the walls. What did they find under there? A painting of our Blessed Mother. But she had been covered up for 300 years and everybody's still bowing to the wall and they have no idea why. This is what Jesus is talking about in the gospel. Why are we doing these things? Do we know why we are doing them? And not only that but where are they coming from? Are they coming from our head, our brain or are they coming from our heart? In the Catholic faith we talk about at retreats, the 18 inch drop. That means taking God and your faith from here (pointing to head) down to your heart. Okay, maybe you don't have 18 inches between your brain and your heart, it's an average. But it's taking it from your brain to your heart. Why? Because if it is in your heart then laws are not restrictive, you follow laws out of love. We Americans are so much in love with the law. We walk around, "Thereotta be a law." And then when there is a law, "I don't want to follow that!" So we have lawyers by the millions. We have more lawyers per person in the United States than any other country around. This guy was in a thrift store, secondhand store and he saw this bronze rat. He said, "That's pretty cool, I'll put that on my

desk." He buys it but the shop owner says, "Hey, be careful, the last tourists came back and tried to give it back and I said I'm not going to give a refund you can give it to me, I'm not going to give you a refund." He said, "That's fine." As he puts it in his car he notices rats start coming out of everywhere. He drives down the street and the rats are following him. More and more rats. Finally he gets so scared he stops the car, throws the bronze rat into the river and all the rats jump in the river and drown. He goes back to the shop owner, he says, "About that rat." The shop owner says, "I'm not going to give you a refund." He said, "No, I don't want that." He said, "Do you have a bronze lawyer?" I just had to tell a lawyer joke.

Anyway, we are so in love with the law. We have so many laws. When I worked in Mexico, one of my supervisors said, "Mr. Branson, I used to live in the United States." I said, "Well why did you move back?" "Too many laws! If I want to have the dog I had to have a license. If I want to have wife I had to have a license. If I want to go hunting I had to have a license, there are just too many laws in the United States." You're right. But you get upset with them. The thing is people say, "I want to be free, I want to do my own thing." But if there's no laws, guess what. Your own thing, your freedom takes away freedom from somebody else. The laws are there to give us the ability to live in peace with each other. And if we follow the laws, most of the time we are in peace. Same thing with the 10 Commandments. God says, "Here's 10 Commandments, 4 on how to deal with Me and 6 on how to deal with each other." And they were all about love, all about love. God wants us to drop the law from our head to our heart. Why are we following these things why are we doing these things? Are we doing them because we have to because of our head? Somebody told me somebody taught me? Or am I in love with Jesus, am I in love with the Church, and I want to follow the laws because I love Him. I want to be in the Church, I want to be Catholic because I love Him. Because He loved us. Afterall, what was the greatest act of love ever? The Crucifixion. Did Jesus say, "Ah, I think it's a good idea, I'll get up there." No He didn't. He loved each and every one of us so much, He knew He had to be there. And what He saw from the cross, He saw each and every one of us that's ever going to exist, and He loved us from the cross. He did it out of love. He wants us to love each other like He loved us. He wants us to love Him. Not to obey because we have to, because the law says, but to obey because we love Him. We want to be better, we want to be like Him. And afterall, if we look at the laws that Jesus gave us, they give us peace. Jesus wants us to come out of the mind. He wants us to do things, not by word in the mind, but by heart and actions. That's why He gives us this list of things that are evil and tells us, going in they don't cause evil, it's what happens with the heart. If they come from the heart, tremendous evil. Only that, beware of evil in your heart. Today's readings are about faith. Why am I doing things that I do? Why am I Catholic? The answer is, because I love Jesus and His Church. That's the reason that we should be giving. And I help people because I love God, I love Jesus, and He loved them too. Laws are about love, laws are about keeping our individuality as long as we can live peacefully. So we look at the 18 inch drop. Can I today or sometime this week, drop my love of Jesus from saying, "Oh I love Him," to actually feeling it, why I'm a Catholic why I believe in the Church.

God bless you.