

# Fr James' homily for the Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Isaiah 55:1-3  
Second Reading: Romans 8:35-39  
Gospel: Matthew 14:13-21



## House Rules

When you go into someone's house or stay there, there are usually rules: shoes here; coats there; don't leave the seat up; be in by midnight etc. etc. There are rules to God's house too - the same thing as we have recently referred to as choosing the yoke of Christ. Jesus tells us that when we accept his burden, we find it light and refreshing!

Bishop Barron talking about today's scriptures refers to a beautiful verse of Psalm 5:  
**"But I through the abundance of your merciful love will enter your house..."**  
Our theme today is really what happens next. First, to remind ourselves of how we enter God's house, but then, once we enter, that we give first place to keeping the house rules.

The beautiful poetry of the Prophet Isaiah today reminds us, like the words of Psalm 5, of how we enter God's house. **"Oh, come to the water all you who are thirsty..."** In other words, everything comes to us as God's free gift of unfailing love. We enter his house by his free invitation, not by right or by any merit of our own. In other religions this is not so. Every religion works something like a bargain: God will love you if you do X, Y or Z. All too often, we too turn our faith into this distortion of the truth: "I'm doing X, Y or Z so that God will love me." In so doing we may be doing all sorts of good and virtuous things, but in a way that is flawed and not a source of nurture for us. We don't step over the threshold of his house.

Jesus shows us the truth of God's free gift of unfailing love. How? In his death and resurrection. We killed him, and still he comes back with the greeting "Peace be with you." This is the love, the merciful love of God. St Paul today in part of the wonderful chapter 8 of the Letter to the Romans, describes it with great passion:  
**"Nothing can separate us from the love of God shown to us in Christ Jesus."**

Remember my maxim from the Fathers of the Church, that all of Holy Scripture is, in the end, telling us something about Jesus? Well, put the words of Isaiah in your imagination into the mouth of Jesus today, saying to you, from his heart of love: **"Pay attention, come to me; listen and your soul will live"**

The powerful invitation of God in Jesus is graphically illustrated in the Gospel today: Jesus' pity for the people leads him to the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fish. The scene, of course, carries strong resonances of Holy Mass....he takes, he

blesses, he raises his eyes to heaven, he brakes etc... and that is deliberate. Our wonderful privilege of Mass brings us in a unique way into the middle of God's house - we are literally there at his death and resurrection. What an awesome gift - it invites a response of humble adoration.

When we turn this relationship into a bargain, probably not meaning to, or just as bad, think it is our right to be in God's house, to share in the sacraments, we are behaving like the rudest of guests - what do you think of the guest who walks in with muddy shoes, sits down at the head of the table and helps himself without waiting to be asked?! This is a Protestant characteristic: God loves me, so I'm OK. That sort of religion is popular briefly, then burns out.

Nothing can separate us from the love of God - except us ourselves. We can. When we accept God's invitation into his house, then it is time to learn and follow the rules of the house. Not to live by my own rules and laws anymore, not to take his gift for granted. We must use his grace itself to use our own gifts to co-operate with his grace - a virtuous circle. If we abuse our freedom, we shut the door on God ourselves. Your soul will live, says Isaiah. Yes, but only after we have listened, and taken on board what he says. For him, as Isaiah says, and Jesus in the words of consecration at Mass, this is an everlasting, unbreakable covenant.

Amen

*Fr James and Fr Tom wish you a blessed Sunday. Keep safe and well, and never hesitate to pick up the telephone and be in touch. See you in church I hope! Keep in close contact with the website for news of how practical plans are developing.*