

1. If you want to know what the nation is thinking
 - a. Don't read the news papers
 - b. Don't watch MSNBC, FOX or CNN
 - c. Don't listen to Don Imus, Rachel Maddow or god forbid, Rush Limbaugh
2. If you want to know what the nation is thinking.
 - a. Read bumper stickers.
 - b. Yes, a bumper is one of the last places of untrammelled American expression.
3. A trained reader of bumpers is like an amateur bird watcher,
 - a. Who can tell all kinds of things about the driver of that car that just drove by.
 - b. Stickers like "Greenpeace" or "World Wildlife Fund" indicate environmentalists
 - c. "Prolife" or "prochoice" labels warn us to avoid mentioning abortion to the driver
 - d. And of course the resurgence of the 1960's peace symbol in a war - divided country like ours speaks for itself.
4. But recently I saw a bumper sticker that gave me pause.
 - a. It said simply, "Hey, God made the rules, not me."
 - b. I suppose the driver was a sincere Christian,
 - i. Dismayed at what he sees as America's moral relativism
 - ii. Expressing his sincere wish that we would return to Christian morality.
 - c. This wish is expressed so often by so many people,
 - i. That it should not have struck me as strange.
 - d. But the more I thought about it . . . the more it bothered me because I realized that according to this sincere Christian, being faithful meant following rules.
 - i. Now there is nothing wrong with rules
 - ii. Especially when God makes them.
 - e. But that simple statement on that bumper sticker is too simplistic because
 - i. Ignores the role our intellect plays in understanding the rules
 - ii. Ignores the role our conscience plays in applying the rules
 - iii. Ignores the role our society plays in shaping the rules we follow
 - f. And most importantly ignores the fact if our relationship with God or any other relationship for that matter, is only a matter of following rules, well then religion is a simple matter:
 1. Follow the rules and be saved
 2. Break them and be damned.
 - a. And religion is seldom that simple.
5. But lets be honest: that is how religion works for most of us, really.
 - a. Religion is about rules, and salvation means following them.
6. Many in Jesus' day would have agreed.
7. For while the Jewish faith might speak differently about salvation and damnation than we do,
8. One thing they would share with many of us is a belief that God gave us rules.
9. And that it was absolutely important to follow them
 - a. If we wished to ever be the people God calls us to be.
10. The rules, the laws and the commandments of Judaism,
 - a. Gave birth to whole classes of Scribes and Masters of the Law
 - i. Whose job it was to interpret God's law
 - ii. And apply it to difficult circumstances
 - b. They gave birth to whole religious movements, such as the Pharisees,
 - i. Who believed that a radical faithfulness to the letter of God's law

- ii. separated them from the sinfulness of this world
 - iii. And made them the people God called them to be.
- 11. There was a religion of God - given rules
 - a. that included those who followed them;
 - i. people like the Pharisees
 - b. and excluded those who break them.
 - i. people like Jesus.
- 12. That is right. Like Jesus.
 - a. Because in our sincere desire to follow the rules,
 - b. To be holy, to save America and ourselves,
- 13. We forget that if true religion is following rules,
 - a. Then Jesus was lousy at it.
 - i. He regularly broke the rules,
 - ii. And encouraged others to do the same
- 14. This infuriated the Pharisees, the scribes and the Masters of the Law.
 - a. For God made the rules, not them;
 - b. And by breaking them, not only was Jesus sinning,
 - i. but so were the people who followed him.
 - c. It is little wonder that they were driven to kill him;
 - i. Because they had to stop Jesus before so many people started following him instead of the rules,
 - 1. that God would punish them all.
- 15. Sound familiar? It should.
 - a. It is the same logic that caused Jerry Falwell to preach
 - i. that Hurricane Katrina was God's punishment of sinful New Orleans,
 - b. That caused Pat Robertson to proclaim
 - i. that 9/11 was God's punishment of sinful America,
 - c. And countless others to opine that AIDS is God's punishment of gays.
- 16. But what is wrong with this logic is NOT so much that there are rules;
- 17. What is wrong is that
 - a. It ignores the fact the rules become everything;
 - b. It ignores the fact that the rules become idols;
 - c. images of God and God's will graven not in wood or stone
 - i. but in judging words and hateful actions.
- 18. In short it ignores God and worships and loves the rules;
 - a. and rejects and hates anyone or anything which does not follow them.
- 19. Only against this background of their hatred and our fears,
 - a. can we begin to understand Jesus' words in today's Gospel.
 - b. Because in a world where people's salvation was measured against how well they followed the rules,
 - c. Jesus speaks of a God who works through him
 - i. not to judge people but to save them,
 - ii. not to reject them, but to save them,
 - iii. not to kill them but to raise them on the last day.
 - d. All of them; not just the perfect,
 - i. who supposedly would not be in need of salvation,
 - e. but especially the imperfect,

- f. not just the saints but especially the sinners,
 - i. everyone given to him by God.
- 20. God made the rules;
- 21. But the God of Jesus is bigger than the rules
 - a. Because according to Jesus, God, who made the rules,
 - b. Is also capable of forgiving those who break them.
- 22. In short, is willing to forgive us.
 - a. We experience that forgiveness every time we go to confession, and hear the words of absolution, “I absolve you of all your sins”
 - b. We celebrate that forgiveness every time we celebrate mass;
 - c. And hear the words of consecration, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all for the forgiveness of sins”
 - d. And we remember that forgiveness every year on the holy days we celebrate this weekend: All Saints day All Souls Day.
- 23. All Saints day is the day we remember all the multitudes of people who share the eternal life Jesus promises in today’s Gospel.
 - a. They are the perfect; the holy the saints.
- 24. But today is all souls Day. On this day, who do we remember? Every one who struggles to be good, but often ends up being bad, struggles to be faithful but often is not; struggles to follow the law, but ends up breaking it.
 - a. In short today we remember all of us.
 - i. and we pray for all those imperfect, sinful people of faith
 - ii. who broke the rules, yet still love God.
- 25. Why? Because our Church is not a church of rules but of forgiveness.
 - a. And for centuries we have proclaimed that
 - i. a God who forgives could never punish forever in hell a person who struggled to be good in this life but was not.
 - b. A God who forgives
 - i. is the reason why Catholics believe in a place called purgatory,
 - ii. where all the effects sin has had on our life are purged;
 - iii. cleansed, removed, forgotten.
 - c. A God who forgives
 - i. is the reason we pray for the people who are in purgatory
 - 1. So that they might enjoy the fullness of life
 - 2. with the saints in heaven
 - ii. the reason we offer masses for them,
 - iii. and why the masses we offer today
 - 1. pray especially for these holy souls
 - d. For while indeed God may have made the rules;
 - e. We forget sometimes that God
 - i. is also capable of forgiving us who break them,
 - f. And that God generous with that forgiveness,
 - i. because according to Jesus: “This is the will of the one who sent me, that I should not lose anything of what he gave me, but that I should raise it on the last day . . . that everyone who sees the Son and believe in him may have eternal life.” Did you hear that? EVERYONE. He means not only those who have died in the Lord; he means you and me.