

SERMON KRIJTBURG SATURDAY, AUGUST 28, 2021
on Deuteronomy 4.1-2 & 6-8, and Mark 7, 1-8, 14-15 21-33.
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The Scripture readings this Sunday, my dear friends, offer us a whole lot of rules and regulations from the history of the people of God. Moses is at the end of his long life. Coming to the completion of his mission to lead the Israelites from slavery, through the desert to the promised land, he gives a final recommendation to his followers. To enter in, Moses says, and take possession of the land that God is giving you, observe the statutes and decrees which I am setting before you today. These statutes and decrees are known to us as the ten commandments, which are still as valid as ever, down to this day. Live according to these commandments and you will live in peace and enjoy life with your children and grandchildren all the days that the Lord will grant you.

But as so often happens, there are always circumstances where these commandments, in itself quite clear, need further clarification. Over the years those clarifications become a new set of commandments that can turn into a massive burden, which no one is able to shoulder. The Pharisees were very good at that. Together with the scribes they produced so many laws and clarifications that you would always be found transgressing the law one way or the other. The great number of laws frustrates normal human living. Jesus always confronted the Pharisees, when they, in a petty, small-minded way accuse Him or his disciples of ignoring any of those laws. 'Hypocrites' He calls them. You give the impression to serve the Lord, but you in fact do not understand God's will. You teach as doctrine what are just ordinary human precepts.

At the last supper, when Jesus is together with his disciples at table, He gives them his final loving lesson. He sums up all those commandments in one single law: This is my commandment: That you love one another! That one commandment includes the entire law. If only we would be able to love one another our world would be an entirely different and better place.

The verse of our responsorial Psalm, taken from Psalm 15, asks a very pertinent question. "Lord, who shall be admitted to your tent?" Lord, who is deemed worthy to live in your house? Who shall dwell on your holy mountain? Somehow we always feel that only the very best are holy enough to be allowed entrance where God lives. It is utterly human to presume that those who are well fed and well clad and on their best behavior will be worthy of God's attention. Not so long ago we would have a special Sunday dress and suit for Sunday Mass, because Sunday was the Lord's day and only the best would be good enough for God's approval. The way of thinking and judging of the Pharisees is only too human. There is a bit of a Pharisee in most of us when we judge each other by external appearances. And yet, we often do just that more or less automatically. This is not a typical problem of biblical times. It is a hot issue today. There is a lot of talk about discrimination, and although we do not want to discriminate anyone for being different, it certainly needs some getting used to the huge diversity of people walking our streets. And who hasn't judged, positive or negative, without even noticing it. It takes some doing to experience the prejudices we entertain and which we take for granted concerning different behaviour, different cultural expressions we come across. Lord, who shall be admitted to your tent? What prejudice do

You entertain, o God? Or are You absolutely free of prejudice, because You are God and not man?

Every time we meet each other, talk to someone, sooner or later the Covid-theme will come up. Covid has touched all our lives. The restrictions imposed on us have influenced everyone's mood and endurance. We run into prohibitions, no entries, limited numbers, even in church. We were made to keep one-and-a-half-meter distance from each other. But as now half of our population has been vaccinated a new type of discrimination pops up. Who can eat inside and who has to be content with a table on the terrace? Who is welcome in a museum, a cinema, a concert. Entrance for the vaccinated only? The others..... sorry, but not. Lord, who is welcome at your place, on your holy mountain?

Does God have no criteria for letting people in or for refusing them entry? I am inclined to think that with God everyone is welcome. God just loves each and everyone of us, all and sundry.

And yet, reading the gospel we very often hear of people being thrown out into the darkness. For instance that man who ventured into the wedding banquet not wearing a wedding dress. Or those girls without oil for their lamps. And while Lazarus is resting in the bosom of Abraham, the rich man is suffering in hell. Yes, God has a very clear criterium, which Jesus spelled out unmistakably in that great vision of the last judgement. "Go away from me, the judge says, with your curse upon you, for I was hungry and you never gave me food; I was thirsty and you never gave me anything to drink; I was a stranger and you never made me welcome, naked and you never clothed me, sick and in prison and you never visited me. In so far as you neglected to do this to one of the least of my brothers or sisters you neglected to do it for me.

Jesus' one commandment, that we might love each other without restrictions, is the clue. Who loves his or her fellow men will be welcome on God's holy mountain and will find an open door in the house of our heavenly Father, whatever his or her appearances or cultural background. Amen.