

“Commanded by God”

De jure divino and *de jure humano* – that is what Jesus is addressing in the Gospel reading – and we must distinguish between the two. *De jure divino* is literally “by divine law” – and *de jure humano* is “by human law.”

Now, as we begin to distinguish between these two, it’s crucial to understand that this doesn’t mean that one is true and the other is false. Man’s law CAN BE true – it can be good, right and salutary – it can be beneficial. On the other hand, God’s commands are always true – they are always “good.”

The Church has many traditions that are *de jure humano* – by human law. For instance, gathering for the Divine Service on Sunday. God does not command us to gather on any particular day of the week – we could have our main worship service on a Monday, or a Thursday, for instance.

But this is the tradition that has been handed down to us from the time of the apostles. By human arrangement – Christians chose to gather for worship of Sundays because it is the Lord’s day, the day of the Lord’s resurrection. It is the 8th day, the eternal day – it is a day that helps us to remember that we are gathered to Christ who is the source of our forgiveness, the resurrection of our bodies, and our life everlasting.

Individual congregations often have their own traditions as well. I can remember years ago that I hadn’t planned to have the congregation sing Silent Night on Christmas Eve – and it was suggested that I reconsider that. Is there benefit in singing Silent Night? Yes. Does it have to be sung on Christmas Eve? No ... not by God’s command.

It has been suggested that the Pastor hold his hands “outstretched” (like this) – showing you his palms – for the Salutation, and at other times during the Divine Service. This is to teach – to show, to remind you of the Resurrected Christ – who showed His wounded hands to His disciples that first Easter Sunday.

Again, this can be good and beneficial – teaching that the Resurrected Christ is present in the midst of you (just as He promised) – that He is at work through His human instrument – all so that you may know, “the Lord IS with you.”

There are many other traditions that are good – that the Church observes, and hands down to the next generation – but we must always be teaching why we do such things – otherwise they are “just something that we do.”

The tradition of the elders here in our text – the washing of hands when coming from the marketplace, before they ate – CAN BE a good tradition, even if it is “by human law.” Again, the question is why? – what does this mean? – why do we do what we do?

Such a practice could be used to teach how we become soiled by the fallen world in which we live – and how the bartering of men could easily be brought into the church’s mentality of how we live with God – so ... we need to be washed, cleansed by the Lord.

As with all of the “commandments of men” – the distinction must be taught and maintained – highlighting that this is from man, by human arrangement – and therefore, it is not necessary – it can be done away with.

This washing of the hands as taught by the Pharisees was not good, right and salutary. They taught that by doing this, one was honoring God – it was something that man could do to earn God’s favor.

Not only did their commandment contradict God and His Word – but as Jesus says – “their hearts are far from me.” They did not practice this tradition with a faith that looked to God – rather, it was practiced with faith in themselves. That’s the hypocrisy! They claimed to be worshipping God with this practice – but they were only worshipping themselves ... and that is “not good.”

“In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.”
“You leave the commandment of God and hold to the traditions of men.”

Their worship is “vain” Jesus says – it’s “empty.” That’s the result of this commandment taught by man – and to show what He’s talking about – Jesus uses the example of their tradition of “Corban.”

The practice of Corban involved giving your money, possessions (your resources) to God. On the surface that sounds pretty good, but notice what Jesus says. “If a man tells his father or his mother, ‘Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban’ (that is, given to God) – then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down.”

Again, man’s self-made worship practice contradicts God’s Word. Not only was the practice of Corban another attempt to earn God’s favor – the result is that they have harmed their father and their mother. Their self-made law has emptied God’s command to “Honor your father and your mother.”

God’s commands are not empty – they are full of blessing and benefit – for you and your neighbor. When you take care of your parents, that is God at work in and through you – His hands caring for Dad and Mom. And when you don’t care for them ... that’s “not good.”

By God’s arrangement, He works all things for your good. He gives His Son, Jesus Christ, to live for you, His Bride, the Church – and He dies for her. Jesus sanctifies you, cleanses you – not a removal of dirt from the body – but cleanses you with His redeeming blood – creating in you a clean heart, giving you a good conscience, making you to be a new creation.

This is God at work for you – giving Himself up for His Bride – stretching out His hands upon the cross to sanctify you from all impurity – to present you in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any blemish.

Even now He stretches out His hands to give you His Body and Blood – just as He has mandated for His Church – for it is truly good, right and salutary “for you” – that you may be holy in God’s sight, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.