

Sunday August 29, 2021
22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time
Parishioner Reflection
By: Mary Jean Giliberto

Because of our traditions,
We've kept our balance for many, many years.
Here in Anatevka we have traditions for everything...
how to eat, how to sleep, even, how to wear clothes.
For instance, we always keep our heads covered
and always wear a little prayer shawl...
This shows our constant devotion to God.
You may ask, how did this tradition start?
I'll tell you - I don't know. But it's a tradition...
Because of our traditions,
Everyone knows who he is and what God expects him to do.
--Words of Tevye in the song "Tradition" from "Fiddler on the Roof"

Tradition is a valuable part of our religion. We have the Apostolic Tradition, which are the teachings of the Apostles passed down to us. Many of our religious celebrations are embellished with various cultural traditions. We have our own personal traditions that we like to follow. Was Jesus for or against traditions? The answer is a bit of both. Jesus embraced his Jewish heritage. He attended the Jewish festivals. He paid the temple tax. When he cured the lepers, he asked them to go and show themselves to the priest and to make the offering that Moses prescribed for their cleansing. During his public ministry, Jesus said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill."

Yet, on many occasions, Jesus broke with tradition. He cured on the Sabbath. He touched lepers. He ate and drank with sinners. He overturned the tables of the money changers.

How do we reconcile Jesus' seemingly contradictory viewpoints on the value of tradition? Tevye provides some useful insights. He says, "Because of our traditions, we've kept our balance..." When traditions help us to maintain a proper balance in our lives, this is a good thing. When they throw us off balance, we need to take a closer look and figure out how to get back on track.

Tevye also says that traditions are a way of showing our constant devotion to God. This is true if the devotion comes from the heart, but If our hearts are far from God, traditions are meaningless.

God wants us to love him, not out of a sense of obligation, but as an act of our free will. How do we love God? If we go to Mass on Sunday and obey the commandments, does that mean we love God? It depends on the disposition of our hearts. If God is the center of our lives and if we do all these things in a spirit of selfless giving to God, then the answer is yes. If we are resentful of our Sunday obligation because we have better things to do, and if we grudgingly obey the commandments, then the answer is no. God wants our hearts, not blind obedience to a set of rules.

There is a danger of going to the other extreme of thinking that if we give our hearts to God, then that is enough, and we don't need to be bound by any set of rules. God cannot be separated from His Word. Jesus is the Word incarnate. God's Word is given to us through the gift of Jesus Himself and through the gift of Sacred Scripture, which is inspired by the Holy Spirit. Love of God necessarily includes love of His Word, which means following the teaching of Jesus and obeying the commandments given to us in Sacred Scripture. God wants more than lip service. He wants us to love Him with all our heart, and all our soul, and all our strength, and all our mind. Rules and traditions are not meant to hinder us in loving God, but to help show us the way.