

“Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow.” (Gal 6:7)

Southwestern Germans cook a delicious giant ravioli called *Maultaschen*, a favorite on Holy Thursday and Good Friday. The original recipe, invented by Cistercian monks, calls for a spinach filling. Some folks, however, add ground veal, thus making it unsuitable for the Lenten fast. Not to worry, they say, God, who looks down at our plates from heaven, can't see the meat filling under the ravioli dough. We're good; we've fooled God! So the popular name for these ravioli is a vulgar word (pardon my French!), “Bullshitting the Lord”!

Apart from the profanity, I find something deeply disturbing in this culinary nickname. Why? Because it is very telling of some of our daily behavior towards God. Today's beautiful first reading reminds us how clear the Ten Commandments are, and why they are good for us. The preamble to the Ten Commandments says so: “I the Lord am your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that place of slavery.” This Law from God doesn't come to us from a remote, heartless taskmaster: it comes from a trustworthy God who stuck out for us. He has saved us in the past and will go on doing so. Divine Law is life-giving and liberating because God keeps getting us out of trouble. He demands that we be righteous and earnest in obeying His law because it is the only way we can attain total freedom to love and be loved.

But we play games with His rules. We metaphorically put meat in the ravioli and fool ourselves into thinking we can fool God. Take the way some self-righteous people start their confession: “Father, I didn't kill anybody!” Well, maybe you didn't shoot anyone in the head, but have you gossiped and slandered anyone? Have you had cutting words? Have you driven recklessly? Have you in any way denied the poor sound health insurance? Have you invested money in corporations who mistreat their workers or whose products deal death? Brothers and sisters, I am not inviting you to a guilt trip; what I want to point out is that we can too easily slip into self-righteousness and self-justifying by playing fast and loose with God's law. That is a very dangerous game, because it inevitably leads us to mock Him. But Saint Paul sternly warns us: “Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow.”

That is why Jesus is so angry in the Temple with the merchants and money changers. They are mocking God. You can just picture them saying, “Well, I'm good, because I'm not selling stuff in the Temple proper; I'm selling it by the side door.” Or, “Sure, you're not supposed to hold financial transactions in the Temple, but somebody has to do it, and the high priest told me I'm a law-abiding citizen.” Such people are obeying the letter of the law, but not its spirit. And we too often do the same thing.

Let's think of everyday situations where we try to pull one over our loved ones. You show up on Saint Valentine's with a bunch of red roses for your wife which you actually bought at

the gas station on the way home because the radio reminded you to: but *she* can tell you haven't been planning all week! Or you tell your elderly relatives you got to run because you have work to do, when you're actually going out for a beer with some friends; but *they* know you're lying! Or you give your kids a lame excuse for not going to the beach, when the only reason is your laziness; but they see through you! Who do we think we're fooling when we do this? Sure, we "fulfilled" the law: we gave a nominally "just reason", but the real reason is that we're selfish. So we use the law to hide our lackluster love. But this self-justifying abuse of the law hurts other people's feelings, and damages our trustworthiness. We think we fool others, but we just make fools of ourselves.

So how do we think we could pull one over God without him noticing? Or being hurt? "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked." We cannot make a fool out of Him. He sees all and knows all. He is the God of knowledge and wisdom, and He made Divine Law. He has every right to be angry with us for lying and cheating...

But there is Good News, brothers and sisters! The most amazing thing is that anger is not the be all end all of our Lord and Savior. There was no trace of anger in Jesus when He hung from the Cross. God, out of sheer love for us, agrees to make a fool of Himself daily. "For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength." He makes a fool of Himself by loving us despite our lying and sinning. He made a fool of Himself by coming to live among us, by being shamed in an unfair trial, cruelly tortured, and burdened by a brutal cross; by shedding every drop of His blood and dying for us. And to crown it all, as a farewell gift to us sinners, He breathed His Holy Spirit of life and forgiveness and justice on us. He made us righteous by His Passion and death; despite all our shortcomings, He has set us right. God's wisdom lies in His generosity, in His overflowing love. "God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom."

God can forgive us anything, and will do so, except our attempts at self-righteousness. He alone is our Judge and Savior. He has redeemed us all by His Precious Blood, the very same we will receive here today at the altar. The only thing he asks of us is to be honest and earnest and as generous as He is in applying the Divine Law. He moves us from justice to mercy, from dissimulation to frankness and repentance.

Brothers and sisters, let us therefore beg the Holy Spirit to come within us and show us which merchants and money changers we harbor in our inner Temple. May Jesus drive those enemies of ours from our souls, minds and bodies, that all our lives give glory to the Father, who lives and reigns with them forever and ever. Amen.

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