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21 FRIDAY

Friday , Week 15 of Year

Isaiah 38: 1-6, 21-22, 7-8

Isaiah 38: 10-12, 16

Matt 12: 1 - 8

From the gospels, maybe especially St Matthew, we get a not very attractive impression of the people known as Pharisees. They appear rigid, strict and severe observers of the Law. And their very name, "pharisee", translated into other languages, has an unpleasant and rather dishonest suggestion about it. But they were the "good" people in religious life: upright, honest, devout, zealous. When Jesus criticised them, as He did quite often, it wasn't for their devotion to the Law but for their too minute and unbending attention to details, their tendency to lose sight of the whole purpose of the Law in their zeal for upholding it. Today's gospel reading shows us Jesus' attitude and approach to the serious matter of observing God's law, in this case about the sabbath --- fulfilling its purpose. He is master of the sabbath, an institution meant to serve people in their relationship with God, not be a meaningless burden.

Some people by nature seem inclined towards exact observance of rules and regulations, while others seem more flexible, relaxed. Some people become over-scrupulous, others lax or negligent. In general, where do I stand? Reflecting on my own attitudes, how do they measure up to the way Jesus handled what often seem to be the contradictions of opposites in observing God's law?

As a practical question in my prayer today, what about my "keeping holy the sabbath day"? Public social practices and attitudes to this commandment of the Lord have changed; but personally, whose opinions do I follow, and how do I observe it? May I be a faithful to the Lord, demanding of myself but compassionate for others.