

Ethical Thinking Second Week in Ordinary Time Tuesday, January 21, 2014 8:15 AM
1 Sm 16:1-13; **Mk 2:23-28** (What did David do when his men were hungry? They went into the temple and they ate the bread.)

The gospel tells stories that we are to work with. Here there is an issue of ethics: What is the right thing to do? According to the prevailing, and that does not mean the way it was always thought of, but prevailing at the time of Jesus, the view was that the Law defined what was right. **There was no ethical thinking beyond the Law;** it was the Law. In fact, the Law was often personified as if it were a living organism, and it sprouted new laws, rules, all the time. Some rabbis said that the oral Law—that is the Law that was never written down but was constantly talked about, repeated, and revised, was more important than the written Law. Some said that Jesus did not agree. But what **Jesus did think was that one could think for oneself about what is right and wrong and what is appropriate.**

Now at that time there were two laws or customs that were preeminent. One was sabbath; one was circumcision. They defined what it meant to be Jewish. So when Jesus works on the sabbath, heals of the sabbath, when the disciples pick grain on the sabbath, this is just too much for those who believe the Law defines what is ethical. **Jesus** does not counter with his own authority. He **counters with an example from the past.** These are men who love the past. These are men who have built their entire lives on tradition. So he says, well, let's go back and look and see. **David** is the great anointed one; you admit that. **What did he do when his men were hungry? They went into the temple and they ate the bread.**

The bread in the temple was considered to be the presence of Yahweh. This is not something Jesus made up at the Last Supper. **The idea that bread was the presence of God was already part of the temple setup.** It had six parts to it, each part a different day of the week, all recapitulating creation. **The bread symbolized all of God's living organisms that people can**

take and eat. So there was a table. It had bread on it; it had wine and it had incense. Incense actually grows; it's organic. And this represented all growth, you might say, all life except for the life of the animals. That was represented by the altar. **Animals in the original thinking were given to human beings to sacrifice to God, not to eat, except in communion.** So the original meaning of eating was communion; nourishment came later from the Jewish viewpoint, from the Hebrew viewpoint, from the standpoint of the history of Israel. So Jesus knew all this, was aware of this idea of **altar bread**—showbread it was also called, bread of presence. **Literally it meant bread of face, the face of God present.**

So what did David do? David went into the temple and ate it because he was hungry. Jesus' point is, look, need, **human need, defines what is ethical.** You have to care for human need. Human beings have to eat. So if there is holy showbread, the bread of presence, well, it's not really for ordinary people to eat. **Only the priest** could eat this, but they didn't eat it in order to have communion necessarily. It wasn't the idea of communion. It was more you eat it because it's going to get stale and will be no good and we have to preserve it; we have to keep it; we have to care for it. That was why they **ate it on the sabbath every week**, on the sabbath the priest ate the bread; then they baked new bread. But **David took this, and he gave it to his men because they were hungry.** Jesus is saying, now look, what is your idea of right and wrong? What is your idea of the will of God? **I'm saying the will of God is that the hungry should eat.**