

**Torah and Law on the Heart**      Third Week of Lent      Wednesday, March 22, 2017  
8:15 AM    Dt 4:1, 5-9;    **Ps 147;**    **Mt 5:17-19**    (Paul's point is that actually God's work is far greater and deeper and more universal than his tradition ever acknowledged.)

**“He has not done thus for any other nation; his ordinances he has not made known to them.”**

This is from the Psalm 147. It was our response this morning to the reading from the Book of Deuteronomy. The Book of Deuteronomy is the book of the Law. It's a version somewhat different from the Law as is found in Exodus and Leviticus and Numbers. Deuteronomy actually means “second law,” so it's a second version, you might say. And there were more than two. **There were many versions of the Law in ancient times.** Some focus more on ritual. Read the ten commandments in chapter 34 of Exodus. It's really all about rituals, but not chapter 19. That's what you are familiar with, the ethical requirements of the Law. **So there were various approaches to the whole idea of Torah, the instruction of God, in the ancient times.** The point is that **God was always perceived as close.** We have to keep this in mind. God is close. God appears in a sort of human form from time to time as if stepping through a curtain and then returning behind the curtain. But **God is always there even if not visible. So this idea of the presence of God, that is essential to understand the whole scriptural drama.**

Secondly, **God is not arbitrary.** Although there are different interpretations of the Law, **the Law itself is not arbitrary.** It's just. It's fair, not capricious. Now if you bother studying the mythology of the Greeks or the Hindus or any other ancient peoples, you'll see that the gods have, as it were, a right to be capricious, arbitrary. They can do that. That's what it is to be god. It's not to answer to anybody, but not the God of Holy Scripture. **God is never arbitrary, but consistent and even you could say reasonable,** although at times it would go beyond what people might consider reasonable, but **fair and just and impartial**—and impartial. This is a two-edged sword that cuts both ways. He is not partial to the rich, but he is not partial to the poor. He is not partial to the strong, but he is not partial to the weak. **He is impartial, and the Law reflects this.**

Now the reason why this statement in the psalm is a little bit troublesome is, **“He has not done thus for any other nation.”** In one historical sense that's true, but then later on, as you

know, St. Paul in Romans will argue that, well, yes, **only the Jews have the Torah, but actually everyone has access to this through the law written on the heart, which is a way of referring to human reason.** Would the Jews of the past ever have acknowledged this? I doubt it. Would the Hebrews, the Israelites of any tribe, acknowledged this? I doubt it. But **Paul's point is that actually God's work is far greater and deeper and more universal than his tradition ever acknowledged.**

And with that kind of background, we can look at now Matthew who is saying that no jot or tittle, meaning the littlest letters of the Hebrew alphabet, not one jot or tittle would pass away until the whole of the Law is accomplished. And that means that **Jesus lived out in his being everything that the Law talks about.** And that is why Christians have more or less dispensed with the Halakhah and the Talmud and all those descriptions and requirements and rules and regulations, which, as it were, put a fence around the Torah. They didn't need it because we have Jesus. **Jesus embodies what we are doing, what we are supposed to be striving for.** And that is what we have to keep in mind. **Jesus is the walking, living, breathing Torah, and we can do no better than to live and to breathe in him.** And that is the whole meaning of our Baptism. **We are baptized into him** so that we can have the mind of God, the life of God, the behavior of God and, yes, the affections and feelings of God. **Fasting is about letting go of those things that don't fit, the feelings in particular that are petty and small, and too petty and too small for the mind of God.**