

SERMON EPIPHANY 4: OS4A SUNDAY BETWEEN 28 JAN AND 3 FEB:
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RULE OF LIFE

Micah 6.1-8

¹ Listen to what the Lord says: 'Stand up, plead my case before the mountains; let the hills hear what you have to say. ² 'Hear, you mountains, the Lord 's accusation; listen, you everlasting foundations of the earth. For the Lord has a case against his people; he is lodging a charge against Israel. ³ 'My people, what have I done to you? How have I burdened you? Answer me. ⁴ I brought you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam. ⁵ My people, remember what Balak king of Moab plotted and what Balaam son of Beor answered. Remember your journey from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the righteous acts of the Lord .' ⁶ With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? ⁷ Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? ⁸ He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Back in the 500s it was popular to seek religious experiences in isolated North African desert Monasteries. Disgruntled with the crumbling Roman Empire, seekers went out into the desert hoping to find something better. They hoped to find it in the religious life.

Nevertheless, there were a few problems. Seekers often travelled from monastery to monastery constantly seeking something better. Today we call this *"Keeping your options open in case you get a better deal."*

(Apparently today's young people do that when they are asked out on a date-just in case someone better comes along!)

In 516 an Abbott known as Benedict sought to put an end to all this *monastery hopping*. So he wrote a rule now known as *Benedict's Rule of Life*. He then insisted that those entering the monastery follow the rule. Later his Rule would become the standard for many religious orders- most notable the Benedictines.

This rule although written in 516, still seems rather modern in its basic principle. Benedict emphasised living a balanced life:

*Work some,
Rest some,
play some
and pray some.*

(Sounds like an old chocolate bar advertisement, or even a modern-day health programme).

Now Benedict had a problem with how to be hospitable. So he devised a “Hospitality Rule” explaining how guests are to be treated. (It’s in Chapter 53 of the Rule). I understand that there is a rule for dealing with those who have overstayed their welcome. Apparently, after three days the visitor had either to leave or do chores. Loafing around was not permitted! So, if any of you have guests at the moment, watch out on the third day!

A friend of mine once put it like this:

“Fish and visitors go rotten after the three days.”

Now Benedict’s rule is rather long and complicated (73 Chapters!), and not all people are called to live a monastic life. Nevertheless, the principle of having a rule of life does remain valid.

Back in the 8th Century BC, things were in a bad way in the Holy Land. Wealthy landowners were taking advantage of the poor, many of the religious leaders were corrupt, the custodians of the law were unjust, and false religiosity was on show. Emerging out of this was a little band of prophets: Micah, Amos, Hosea and Isaiah warning the people that disaster would come if they did not change their ways. In today’s reading we heard part of what Micah had to say.

⁶ With what shall I come before the and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? ⁷ Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my

soul? ⁸ He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6.1-8,NRSV)

It's a simple plea in the midst of a corrupt world. God, through the prophet, is reminding the people that life is not that complicated. Keep it simple!

*Act justly.
Love mercy
And walk humbly with your God.*

This also is rule of life. One which is a little less complicated than Benedict's 73 Chapters!

Nevertheless, it challenges us to live lives of justice, mercy, and humility. It's for us all and we all need God's grace to help us live it!

After all it's not always easy to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly when:

Your tradie tempts you to pay in cash as a tax dodge,
After a very long wait in the Emergency Department someone with a greater need is allowed to jump the queue.
or are tempted to buy a luxury car just to impress the neighbours.

(In case you are wondering, yes, I have been tempted to do all these things, except the car-only because I have a limited budget!)

Remember, take a deep breath, allow that breath to become God's Spirit within you, and say to yourself:

Be just, be merciful and be humble.

In the end, when your days are over, these are the things that people will remember.

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**