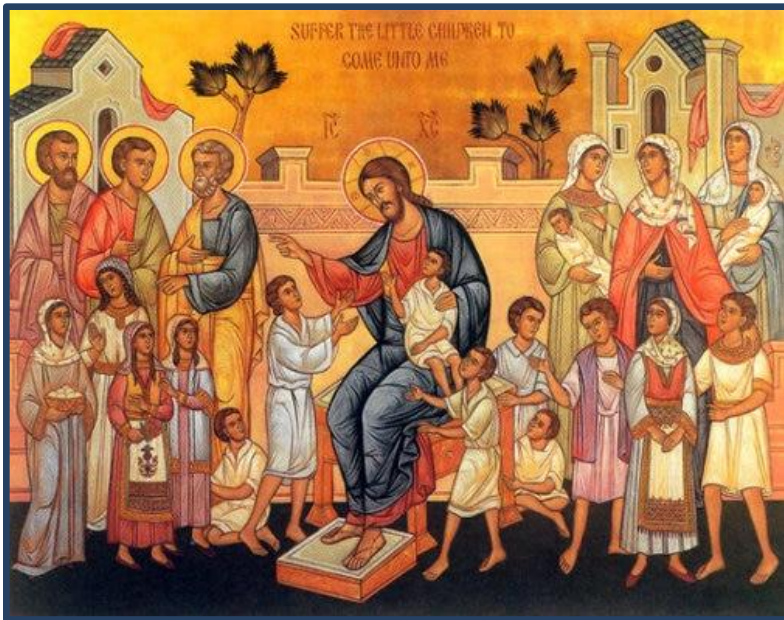




While in the seminary, I taught religious education one day a week in a Catholic High School. I recall a young man's comments in class, "Christianity is just a bunch of rules and regulations ... don't do this ... don't do that ... I just want to have fun." Of course, the presumption here is that the rules and regulations of Christianity somehow hinder our freedom and prevent us from having fun. How do we respond to this young man?

First, as we hear in the Gospel today (Mt 22:34-40), "the whole law and the prophets" depend on just two commandments: "love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and

with all your mind" and "love your neighbor as yourself." All the teachings of the Church, all the dictates of the law and prophets, all the "rules and regulations" of Christianity are simply specifications on how to follow one single rule – the rule of love.

Of course, we all "want to have fun." But, at the same time, we all want to be fulfilled as human beings. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out, having fun must be subordinate to the law of love. If you need to violate the law of love in order to have "fun," your "fun" will actually be destructive to your true fulfillment as a human being, and it will also be destructive to others! Sometimes love requires self-denial, hard work, sacrifice; but even so, love is the only way to human fulfillment. Pope St. John Paul II wrote, "Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it (*Familiaris Consortio*, #18)."

Secondly, is it true that the "rules and regulations" of Christianity hinder our freedom? On the contrary, the moral law of God protects and promotes our freedom! Listen to Pope St. John Paul II:

"Freedom is not unlimited...it is called to accept the moral law given by God. In fact, human freedom finds its authentic and complete fulfillment precisely in the acceptance of that law. God who alone is good, knows perfectly what is good for man, and by virtue of his very love proposes this good to man in the commandments. God's law does not reduce, much less do away with human freedom; rather, it protects and promotes that freedom." (*Veritatis Splendor*, #35)

In the final analysis, Jesus teaches us a different way of understanding the "bunch of rules and regulations" taught by our holy Catholic Church. Behind each of these rules stands the person of Christ, who is perfect Love. Jesus created us in love. In love He emptied Himself and was born in a manger. In love for us he suffered, sacrificed, and died. The moral teachings of the Church, all the "rules and regulations," are in fact an expression of God's love. Living in fidelity to the rules is not simply a matter of jumping through hoops, it connects us with the living God – with Jesus Himself! No, it may not always be fun to follow Jesus, but we have it on the highest authority, it is ALWAYS FULFILLING! I leave you with the soothing words of Mother Teresa of Calcutta: "My prayer for you is that you may grow in holiness through love for one another—for where there is love, there is peace.... And if there is peace, there is joy. So keep the joy of loving one another in your hearts, and share this joy with all you meet."

Your Servant in Christ,
Fr. Terry Staples