

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Jul 21st 2017

Walking through standing grain rings a bell in my experience, a reminiscence of childhood walks along still green wheat fields with my dad and brother. We were not hungry, we just picked heads of wheat for the fun of it, for the taste of the still milky grains. Jesus' situation was different. He was an itinerant rabbi without income, depending on people's goodness of heart and at times both he and his disciples were hungry, as the gospel reading tells us was the case today. So they helped themselves to a few heads of grain.

In my childhood case no one accused my brother or me of stealing: what is a few heads in a wheat field? Actually stealing was not the point of the Pharisees' reproach either. What raised their hackles was the violation of a norm of behavior and this is precisely what Jesus rejects: the absolutizing of norms, placing norms above people. When we absolutize, we do not make allowances for special circumstances: upbringing, acumen, sickness, special needs... Jesus always made allowances. Remember the woman caught in adultery: financial pressure? blackmailing? The norm was valid for Jesus: you shall not commit adultery. But: neither do I condemn you... don't do it again. For Jesus caring for the person was more important than caring for the rules.

We need to remain aware that the Sabbath is for people and not people for the Sabbath. Norms are for people, not vice versa.

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