

There's a T-shirt out now for chocoholics that reads, "Just give me some chocolate and nobody gets hurt." Chocolate is a fairly harmless addiction. Why do people love it so much? It contains caffeine, and they say chocolate contains the chemical your body naturally produces whenever you fall in love.

Actually we can get addicted to anything, including things that are good for us. People get addicted to exercise, or to a regular morning routine. If you read the paper every morning and you can't, it can throw you off balance because the routine has become a kind of addiction. *one day*

Similarly, the Pharisees were addicted to something good. They were addicted to tradition. So when they see some of the disciples--it's not even all of them--some of the disciples not washing their hands before eating, they stop Jesus. This disregard for tradition has thrown them off balance.

Jesus says, "Calm down. They do share your beliefs; they don't share your addictions. They do thank God for food; they don't wash their hands every time they eat it." Or, "They do care about world news; they don't read the paper every morning." Washing hands is a good addiction to have--I don't want kids to tell their parents Father said we don't have to clean up today. But if one of them grabs a cookie in the middle of homework or a soccer game, it doesn't mean they've lost a total regard for hygiene.

The whole Catholic Church went through this in the 1960's. We had good, positive "addictions" as a Church. I grew up serving Mass in Latin and never eating meat on Fridays. These were good practices, but we said we can let them go because what's important is in the heart. We changed some practices, but we kept our beliefs.

Whenever we change customs or addictions, people wonder, "Is there anything left? Are there any rules?" A panicky response is natural. I think that's why Jesus ~~recounts~~ *concludes with* this list of vices. He assures the Pharisees there are some boundaries, including fornication, theft, and murder. But not handwashing.

In a society where getting over addictions is popular, I think it's important to remember there are some boundaries set by our faith. If someone has begun the process of dying and there's no reasonable hope for recovery, we need not be "addicted to life", so to speak, but that's different from euthanasia if that means initiating the process of dying, or hastening it for a patient in reasonable health. Euthanasia forms a boundary. The same is true of suicide, in spite of the popularity of this new book on how to do it. Human life is holy, and once we consider ending human life we enter serious moral territory.

It's good to let go of our addictions. It's risky to let go of our beliefs.

*we can let the person die.*