



LIVING THE GOSPEL



**22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time
September 1st 2024**

Theme: "There is nothing outside a man which by going into him can defile him; but the things which come out of a man are what defile him."

Gathering Prayer

All: God of might, giver of every good gift, put into our hearts the love of your name, so that, by deepening our sense of reverence, you may nurture in us what is good and, by your watchful care, keep safe what you have nurtured. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Exploring the Word

Gospel Reading: Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

¹ Now when the Pharisees gathered together to him, with some of the scribes, who had come from Jerusalem, ² they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands defiled, that is, unwashed. ³ (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they wash their hands, observing the tradition of the elders; ⁴ and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they purify themselves; and there are many other traditions which they observe, the washing of cups and pots and vessels of bronze.) ⁵ And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with hands defiled?"

⁶ And he said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; ⁷ in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.' ⁸ You leave the commandment of God, and hold fast the tradition of men." ...

¹⁴ And he called the people to him again, and said to them, "Hear me, all of you, and understand: ¹⁵ there is nothing outside a man which by going into him can defile him; but the things which come out of a man are what defile him." ... ²¹ For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, ²² coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. ²³ All these evil things come from within, and they defile a man.

Gospel Focus

Jesus is not saying not to wash our hands before we eat—that is, in fact, a good idea. He is saying, though, that the ritual cleanliness practiced by the Pharisees and the scribes is not the same as moral behavior. These things can, and often do, exist in the same person; they are not in opposition to each other. However, ritual observance is not necessarily the same as a life lived with the goodness God wants for and from each one of us. It is all too impossible to have one without the other. We should participate in

liturgy and ritual, but we cannot stop there. We need to let God accompany us not just on Sunday but throughout our everyday lives as well.

Gospel Reflection

In today's gospel the Pharisees and scribes challenge Jesus, asking why his disciples don't follow the practices that have been handed on regarding ritual washing. The roots of these practices are found in Exodus 30:19; 40:12. They concern the custom of priests to wash their hands and feet before entering the tent of meeting. By the second century BCE, some Jews who were not priests had voluntarily assumed the practice of ritual washing of hands before Morning Prayer and before eating. In the gospel reading the washing extends also to the utensils for preparing the meal and to the purification of the dining couch. The Pharisees seem to presume these should be universal practices. But such observances would have been nearly impossible for peasants farmers, fishermen, and itinerants such as Jesus, given the scarcity of water and contact with dead fish and other pollutants. This "tradition of the elders" (v.3) would have been largely defined and maintained by urban elites.

In response to the Pharisees, Jesus quotes the prophet Isaiah, exposing the disconnection between lip service and motivations of the heart. It is not only that Jesus' opponents have forgotten the true motivation of religious practices; they have submitted humanly contrived practices for God's commandments. Jesus points toward examination of our inner motives. Our practices must flow from and reflect our profound experience of God's love and care.

It can happen, however, that originally good practices deteriorate over time into meaningless customs or, worse yet, into showy external observance. It is good to periodically examine our religious practices, assessing how well they embody God's love and how they impel us toward greater love of one another.

It is important to recognize the ways in which the heart can stray, as the ending of today's gospel emphasizes. The enumeration of vices is a typical teaching device used by hellinistic philosophers (see also Rom 1:29-31; Gal 5:9-21). Jesus warns that it is not external observance or lack of it that determines one's relationship with God but a heart that is ever being transformed by divine love, which then becomes visible in concrete acts.

The letter of James elaborates on how our care for the most vulnerable serves as the measuring rod for how well we are putting into action the saving word that we hear. It is not enough to experience love within our hearts; love must find expression in outward deeds. And it is not only an individual recipient of a kind act who benefits from heart-motivated devotion to God; the faithful keeping of God's commandments gives far-reaching witness to others. In the reading from Deuteronomy, Moses tells the people that their observance of God's commands is not only for their benefit, but it will also cause the other nations to marvel at God's graciousness and justice.

Old/New Testament and CCC links

First Reading — Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-8

¹ "And now, O Israel, give heed to the statutes and the ordinances which I teach you, and do them; that you may live, and go in and take possession of the land which the LORD, the God of your fathers, gives you. ² You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it; that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you. ... ⁶ Keep them and do them; for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' ⁷ For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? ⁸ And what great nation is there, that has statutes and ordinances so righteous as all this law which I set before you this day?

Responsorial Psalm—Ps 15:2-3, 3-4, 4-5

Response: The one who does justice will live in the presence of the Lord.

Whoever walks blamelessly and does justice;
who thinks the truth in his heart and slanders not with his tongue. **(R)**

Who harms not his fellow man, nor takes up a reproach against his neighbor;
by whom the reprobate is despised, while he honors those who fear the Lord. **(R)**

Who lends not his money at usury and accepts no bribe against the innocent.
Whoever does these things shall never be disturbed. **(R)**

Second Reading — James 1:17-18, 21-22, 27

¹⁷ Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. ¹⁸ Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures. ...

²¹ Therefore put away all filthiness and rank growth of wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. ²² But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. ...

²⁷ Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

Catechism of The Catholic Church

574. From the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, certain Pharisees and partisans of Herod together with priests and scribes agreed together to destroy him.(Cf. Mk 3:6; 14:1) Because of certain acts of his expelling demons, forgiving sins, healing on the sabbath day, his novel interpretation of the precepts of the Law regarding purity, and his familiarity with tax collectors and public sinners(Cf. Mt 12:24; Mk 2:7,14-17; 3:1-6; 7:14-23) -- some ill-intentioned persons suspected Jesus of demonic possession.(Cf. Mk 3:22; Jn 8:48; 10:20) He is accused of blasphemy and false prophecy, religious crimes which the Law punished with death by stoning.(Cf. Mk 2:7; Jn 5:18; 7:12, 52; 8:59; 10:31, 33)

581. The Jewish people and their spiritual leaders viewed Jesus as a rabbi.(Cf. Jn 11:28; 3:2; Mt 22:23-24, 34-36) He often argued within the framework of rabbinical interpretation of the Law.(Cf. Mt 12:5; 9:12; Mk 2:23-27; Lk 6:6-g; Jn 7:22-23) Yet Jesus could not help but offend the teachers of the Law, for he was not content to propose his interpretation alongside theirs but taught the people "as one who had authority, and not as their scribes".(Mt 7:28-29) In Jesus, the same Word of God that had resounded on Mount Sinai to give the written Law to Moses, made itself heard anew on the Mount of the Beatitudes.(Cf. Mt 5:1) Jesus did not abolish the Law but fulfilled it by giving its ultimate interpretation in a divine way: "You have heard that it was said to the men of old. . . But I say to you. . ."(Mt 5:33-34) With this same divine authority, he disavowed certain human traditions of the Pharisees that were "making void the word of God".(Mk 7:13; cf. 3:8)

582. Going even further, Jesus perfects the dietary law, so important in Jewish daily life, by revealing its pedagogical meaning through a divine interpretation: "Whatever

goes into a man from outside cannot defile him. . . (Thus he declared all foods clean.). . . What comes out of a man is what defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts. . ."(Mk 7:18-21; cf. Gal 3:24) In presenting with divine authority the definitive interpretation of the Law, Jesus found himself confronted by certain teachers of the Law who did not accept his interpretation of the Law, guaranteed though it was by the divine signs that accompanied it.(Cf. Jn 5:36; 10:25, 37-38; 12:37) This was the case especially with the sabbath laws, for he recalls, often with rabbinical arguments, that the sabbath rest is not violated by serving God and neighbor,(Cf. Num 28 9; Mt 12:5; Mk 2:25-27; Lk 13:15-16; 14:3-4; Jn 7:22-24) which his own healings did.

1764. The passions are natural components of the human psyche; they form the passageway and ensure the connection between the life of the senses and the life of the mind. Our Lord called man's heart the source from which the passions spring.(Cf. Mk 7:21)

2197. The fourth commandment opens the second table of the Decalogue. It shows us the order of charity. God has willed that, after him, we should honor our parents to whom we owe life and who have handed on to us the knowledge of God. We are obliged to honor and respect all those whom God, for our good, has vested with his authority.

Sharing and Discussion

1. St James say "22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves," how are we deceiving ourselves when we are not doers of the word?
2. What difficulties do you encounter when striving to align your heart and actions with the message of the verse, "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me"?
3. What is your motivation to attend Mass—obligation or a desire to deepen your faith and relationship with God?

Closing Prayer

All: Generous God, you inspire disciples across generations to be people of integrity. Receive our prayers that we might be emboldened to proclaim your word to all those we meet, today and always. Amen.

Leader: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life.

All: Amen