



TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
Heart of Faith - August 29, 2021

• DT 4:1-2, 6-8. • JAS 1:17-18, 21B-22, 27
Gospel of Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

When the Pharisees with some scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus, they observed that some of his disciples ate their meals with unclean, that is, unwashed, hands.

For the Pharisees and, in fact, all Jews, do not eat without carefully washing their hands, keeping the tradition of the elders. And on coming from the marketplace they do not eat without purifying themselves. And there are many other things that they have traditionally observed, the purification of cups and jugs and kettles and beds.

So the Pharisees and scribes questioned him, "Why do your disciples not follow the tradition of the elders but instead eat a meal with unclean hands?" He responded, "Well did Isaiah prophesy about you hypocrites, as it is written: This people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines human precepts. You disregard God's commandment but cling to human tradition." Jesus admonishes the Pharisees and scribes that following strict rituals may actually lead to disregarding the spirit of the commandments themselves

He summoned the crowd again and said to them, "Hear me, all of you, and understand. Nothing that enters one from outside can defile that person; but the things that come out from within are what defile.

"From within people, from their hearts, come evil thoughts, unchastity, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, folly. All these evils come from within and they defile."

REFLECTION

After weeks of listening to Jesus' discourse on the Bread of Life, we return to Mark's Gospel. And this week we listen to the first of many excerpts from St. James. All readings speak to us about adherence to God's Word and serving with purity of heart. In the first reading, the law, as presented in Deuteronomy, provides for the people of Israel to draw closer to God. James' audience are Jew and Gentile converts.

The Gospel recounts a dialogue between the Pharisees and Jesus. The Pharisees questioned why Jesus' disciples did not practice the ritual washing before eating a meal. Jesus simply responded by quoting scripture, "This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines human precepts."

The Pharisees knew all the traditions and customs, ensured they followed them, and ensured that it would be made known if someone else did not follow them. Jesus answers that holiness involves a lot more than ritual washing. It entails a *lived* faith which responds to God's Word and cooperates with God's forgiving, cleansing grace. Impeccably washed hands are no substitute for a clean heart.

DISCUSSION

1. Jesus' response reminds us to ask ourselves: Why do we remain faithful to God's commands? Because we know we should or because we are afraid of what might happen if we do not? Are we checking boxes?

2. Look inward at our hearts and go a step further: Consider the many ways we approach our relationship with Jesus – how do they guide us? Why do we pray or go to Mass? Why participate in the sacraments? How do they intersect? Can you connect how they help us honor God wholeheartedly?

- Mass – ways to worship and show gratitude
- Sacraments - ways to draw us closer to Him and His grace
- Commandments – laws of love for man to God, man to man

3. From St. James, what does “humbly welcoming the Word of God” mean to you? How easy or hard is it for you to do this? What “word” have you failed to act on? How do you get back on track?

4. In the final verse of the Gospel, Jesus says it is from inside, from hardened hearts, where evil may find a way in. To be human means we will sometimes experience suffering, and yet we can choose how to respond. Do we try to toughen up our hearts and try to protect them further, or follow the way of Jesus and allow our hearts to be softened so that we may better love one another?

If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts” (Hebrews 3:15 and Psalm 95:8).

Close in prayer to allow our hearts to be more open to whatever the Lord has to tell us ...

CREATE IN ME

*Lord, create in me a clean heart. Life is so complicated, busy and challenging.
But amid the chaos, please give me the strength and courage to see people, places, things and events
through Your eyes.*

*Please guide me and change me, oh God.
Please give me Your heart for others and the world around me.
Each and every day, help me to see, through Your eyes,
the truth of what is, what has been and what will one day come.
In the name of Your son Jesus I pray, Amen.*