

Commentary on the Gospel: A Heart in Love

Gospel for the 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B), and commentary.

Gospel (*Mk* 7:1-8.14-15.21-23)

Now when the Pharisees gathered to Jesus, with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem, they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands properly, holding to the tradition of the elders, and when they come from the marketplace,

they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches.) And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, “Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?”

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; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.”

And he called the people to him again and said to them, “Hear me, all of you, and understand: There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are

what defile him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”

Commentary

In today's Gospel we meditate on some words of our Lord about purity of heart. This passage is closely linked to *Mt 5:8*: “Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.” Considering these two passages together leads us to a conclusion: to be happy, we need to look into the depth of our heart and see if we are truly striving to love God and our fellow men and women. It is by doing so that we will see God.

The Pharisees are scandalized because Jesus' disciples fail to fulfill some of the Jewish traditions, such as washing their hands before eating. Jesus encourages the Pharisees to fulfill the precepts not simply because they are traditions, but because they are the path for loving God.

Our Lord does not want a mere formal fulfillment. He calls the Pharisees "hypocrites" for acting simply to fulfill traditions, with their heart distant from God and those around them. In Greek, hypocrite means an actor or person who wears a mask in the theater. That is, someone who lives in a different way than how they behave before others. God does not want masks in our lives. The only spectator who matters is God. He is the one who sees everything we do. We cannot wear a mask to hide from Him.

Unfortunately, many Christians today can fall into a pharisaical attitude, by limiting themselves to fulfilling a set of rigid rules, without a heart in love. Let us recall Jesus' words: "And he said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself' (*Mt 22:37-39*). Jesus invites us to look within ourselves. He doesn't want us simply to fulfil obligations, but to truly love with a clean heart.

He wants us to look into the depths of our heart. "For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person." But the heart is also

the place where all the good in us arises: service to others, generosity, humility, love for the sacred, modesty, love for God and our fellow men and women.

How can I know what God's will is for me? To discern between good and evil, we have a means of great value: prayer. To pray is to speak with God in the depth of our hearts. There we learn what God's will is for us.

To pray sincerely, we need to free our heart from our own deceptions, from sin. Sin changes our interior vision, our way of evaluating things. It makes us see things that are not true. Our worst enemy is hidden within, so we need to convert our heart to God.

Let us ask our Lord in our prayer to help us love Him and others in each and every circumstance of our daily life. Let us ask for a heart filled with his Love.

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