

Tuesday's Gospel: Cleaning the Inside

Gospel for Tuesday in the 28th Week of Ordinary Time, with commentary.

Gospel (*Lk 11:37-41*)

While he was speaking, a Pharisee asked him to dine with him; so he went in and sat at table. The Pharisee was astonished to see that he did not first wash before dinner.

And the Lord said to him, “Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of extortion and wickedness. You fools! Did not he who made the

outside make the inside also? But give for alms those things which are within; and behold, everything is clean for you.”

Commentary

That Pharisee must have been amazed by the teachings he had just heard and he had the audacity to invite Jesus to eat with him. Our Lord could not say no to such an insistent plea. Such trust must have been established between the two that Jesus broke the usual protocol of purifying his hands since, as he had already told some Pharisees and scribes, “to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man” (*Mt 15:20*). But that small gesture scandalized the Pharisee. His sincere admiration for the Teacher’s marvelous doctrine suddenly changed into strong

criticism because of a minor point. Jesus responds with a reproach, echoing words of the prophet: “Though you wash yourself with lye and use much soap, the stain of your guilt is still before me” (*Jer* 2:22).

How often we see Jesus indignant at human hypocrisy, at the lack of coherence in people’s behavior! Above all, when great effort is expended in caring for appearances while neglecting one’s interior life. This incoherence is a rupture in the unity of the human person. “Did not he who made the outside make the inside also?” What is the point of keeping only the outside of a vessel clean? No one would want to drink from it, no matter how clean it was on the outside. It would be a totally useless vessel for the purpose for which it was made. Jesus uses that image to warn us of a great danger: that in the same person an evil heart

can coexist with a goodness that is only apparent.

God is the one who has made us, both inside and out, and He wants to live within us, so that our external actions reflect our inner life. Only from the depths of a pure heart can good works come forth. Among them almsgiving stands out, which “saves from death and purges away every sin” (*Tobias* 12:9). We can make the words of the psalmist our own: “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me” (*Ps* 51:10).