

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

The Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered round Jesus, and they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with unclean hands, that is, without washing them. For the Pharisees, and the Jews in general, follow the tradition of the elders and never eat without washing their arms as far as the elbow; and on returning from the market place they never eat without first sprinkling themselves. There are also many other observances which have been handed down to them concerning the washing of cups and pots and bronze dishes. So these Pharisees and scribes asked him, 'Why do your disciples not respect the tradition of the elders but eat their food with unclean hands?' He answered, 'It was of you hypocrites that Isaiah so rightly prophesied in this passage of scripture: This people honours me only with lip-service, while their hearts are far from me. The worship they offer me is worthless, the doctrines they teach are only human regulations. You put aside the commandment of God to cling to human traditions.' He called the people to him again and said, 'Listen to me, all of you, and understand. Nothing that goes into a man from outside can make him unclean; it is the things that come out of a man that make him unclean. For it is from within, from men's hearts, that evil intentions emerge: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, malice, deceit, indecency, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within and make a man unclean.'

In the gospel, Jesus comes into conflict with the Pharisees who had a great regard for what is referred to in that gospel as 'the tradition of the elders.'

These were traditions that had been passed down orally for hundreds of years and that applied the Jewish Law to all the details of daily living.

These traditions were not written in the Scriptures but they had come to acquire an authority that was equal to that of the Scriptures. In their zeal to uphold these human traditions, the religious leaders have ended up undermining the commandment of God. What mattered so much to the Pharisees did not matter to God. What does matter to God, according to Jesus, is what is in our heart and what comes from out of our heart.

TWENTY SECOND SUNDAY ORDINARY TIME

Year B

29th August 2021



Our readings remind us to stay focused on God's commandments, and not be distracted by traditions which perhaps over time assume greater importance. The word tradition, means to hand something on from generation to generation, but human nature being what it is, traditions can sometimes be justified on the basis that it was something that people always did, such as Apartheid, and other systems of injustices. Jesus challenges the Pharisees as indeed he does each one of us to honour God by making the cleanliness of one's soul our goal rather than an appearance of clean living.

Opening Prayer

Almighty God, every good thing comes from you. Fill our hearts with love for you, increase our faith, and by your constant care protect the good you have given us.

Deuteronomy 4:1-2,6-8

Moses said to the people: ‘Now, Israel, take notice of the laws and customs that I teach you today, and observe them, that you may have life and may enter and take possession of the land that the Lord the God of your fathers is giving you. You must add nothing to what I command you, and take nothing from it, but keep the commandments of the Lord your God just as I lay them down for you. Keep them, observe them, and they will demonstrate to the peoples your wisdom and understanding. When they come to know of all these laws they will exclaim, “No other people is as wise and prudent as this great nation.” And indeed, what great nation is there that has its gods so near as the Lord our God is to us whenever we call to him? And what great nation is there that has laws and customs to match this whole Law that I put before you today?’

Moses knows the human capacity to water down the rules so as to justify a behaviour not aligned with God’s commandments. He knows how easily they can be made more palatable and easier to follow. What was once a commandment is now a tradition, handed on from one generation to another, with little or no connection to God its author.

I hold fast to your statutes, O LORD; do not let me be put to shame. Teach me to follow your decrees; then I will keep them to the end. Give me understanding, and I will keep your law and obey it with all my heart. Direct me in the path of your commands, for there I find delight. (Ps119)

Psalm 14(15):2-5

Lord, who shall dwell on your holy mountain? He who walks without fault; he who acts with justice and speaks the truth from his heart.

He does no wrong to his brother; who casts no slur on his neighbour; who holds the godless in disdain, but honours those who fear the Lord.

He who keeps his pledge, come what may; who takes no interest on a loan and accepts no bribes against the innocent. Such a man will stand firm forever.

James 1:17-18,21-22,27

It is all that is good, everything that is perfect, which is given us from above; it comes down from the Father of all light; with him there is no such thing as alteration, no shadow of a change. By his own choice he made us his children by the message of the truth so that we should be a sort of first-fruits of all that he had created.

Accept and submit to the word which has been planted in you and can save your souls. But you must do what the word tells you, and not just listen to it and deceive yourselves.

Pure, unspoilt religion, in the eyes of God our Father is this: coming to the help of orphans and widows when they need it, and keeping oneself uncontaminated by the world.

Again, just as Jesus reminds us in today’s gospel of Isaiah’s prophecy that the people Israel would only pay lip-service to the Word of God (while their hearts are far from Him), James invites us to act upon the Word of God, rather than to just listen to it, in other words to put our faith into action. Authentic faith should be always changing us in ways that only we know about. Through prayer we seek God’s grace to shape and influence our inner lives, to allow divine love to repair, restore and re-orientate us.

Real faith makes a difference when no one else is watching.

Alleluia, alleluia! By his own choice the Father made us his children by the message of the truth, so that we should be a sort of first-fruits of all that he created. **Alleluia!**

(Gospel overleaf)

Prayer over the Offerings

Lord may this holy offering bring us your blessing and accomplish within us its promise of salvation.

Prayer after Communion

Lord, you renew us at your table with the bread of life. May this food strengthen us in love and help us to serve you in each other.