

22nd Sunday of the Year B: Deut 4:1-2' 6-8. Ps 14:2-5; James 1:17-18, 21-27. Mk 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

Our first reading today is from the Book of Deuteronomy, one of the books ascribed to Moses and the one dealing with the end of his life and the imminent entry into the God's Promised Land. In this reading Moses is talking to his people and reminding them that they have messed up badly over the years, which is why the promise took 40 years to fulfil. Over and over they have forgotten the one true God and the teachings of their God. The Letter of James today really defines a "pure and undefiled" religion as caring for others, loving our neighbour, especially those who can't care for themselves and not following the yeas and traidtions of the ungodly world. In the Gospel, Jesus attacks the scribes and Pharisees because they say he is not following these created laws of purity, many of these were traditions and not always biblically based. Some of them came about for hygienic purposes or to suit the needs of priests or ruling bodies. When Jesus was accused of breaking these so called laws, he reminds them that they are merely human traditions and that they should rather commit to a more important teaching of the words of God, the teaching on love and the living out of the true spirit of the Law.

The essence of all religious practice is the condition of our hearts. If the heart is loving and generous, then our worship of God and the following of his teaching is done out of the spirit of love. If our hearts are hardened by selfishness and sin, then our worship and discipleship can be harsh and legalistic. The reading of today including the psalm presents us with an enormous challenge. Is our Sunday mass simply a ritual observance in which we pass through the motions or is it a rich and life-giving event from which we are impelled into action in the world?

Fidelity and internalization of God's law in the heart appears to be the theme of our readings today. Let us now recognize the times we have not been faithful and obedient enough and the times we have been unnecessarily harsh and legalistic. When it comes to the subject of tradition and laws, people's attitudes vary quite dramatically. Some people have an affectionate loyalty to traditional ways of doing things. They feel happy and progressive when they adapt their own values and behaviors to received wisdom reassured by the knowledge that they are following the ways of their ancestors or forebears. G.K Chesterton defines tradition as giving votes to the most obscure of all classes.

On the other hand, some people see tradition as fettering. They call for fresh approaches to fresh situations. They see much of tradition as merely petrified opinion. They insist that it should be consigned to the realm of "once upon a time". What you see as tradition, other people prefer to see it as a large consignment of handcuffs. They consult tradition and old laws but they do not feel obliged to stay within its confines. In today's Gospel, Jesus is accused of flouting sacred tradition. Religious authorities and Pharisees question Jesus for what they consider a disregard for their sacred tradition, though unwritten.

According to the written law of the Jews, ceremonial washing was required only of priests before they enter the sanctuary. During the time of Christ, however, the ritual of hand-washing before every meal and before each course, had been extended to include all pious Jews. This was interpreted by the Pharisees as binding on all Jews. Jesus accuses them of hypocrisy. He tells them that in changing to human traditions, they ignore the

commandment of love. When religious performance is lacking in the heart, it makes for worthless worship. Prophet Isaiah denounces this form of worship in Amos 5:21 "these people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me."

The reading of today teaches us that there is an inherent relationship between liturgy and life (Isaiah 29:13). Worship without right living is abhorrent to God. Jesus believed that when people's lives are centered on God, they are emancipated from the litany of human regulations and self made laws that end to script people's lives. Jesus challenges us today to live a religion of the heart. He invites us to have a heart for him and his values. This should be our real business here in this world.

So how can we be doers of the word this week? First of all let us focus on the two great commandments this week. Find a way to let God know of your love, spend some time with him, talk with him. He is both immanent and transcendent. We acknowledge his greatness and vastness, God he also became one of us and so we can talk with, complain to, beg, and thank God. Then, find a way to focus on our neighbour in need. Perhaps donate time or food to a mission or food bank, or donate to a cause that helps others. Bring extra money to collections next week, offer to clean the church even if just once in a month or once in two months, give to charity, support priests or the training of priests, help a neighbour who cannot help him/herself. Do "something" to remind yourself of the Word of God presented to us this week.

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