

22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

We now return to Saint Mark, for the rest of the year. The Gospel brings out one of the central problems of all religion: the way in which peripheral laws and customs gradually take over the more fundamental commandments, and the way in which “externalism” and a concern with superficialities gradually suffocates a true “internal” faith as it is lived out. Here we see the angry Jesus: he calls them “hypocrites”, as he condemns their “worthless worship”.

Everyone needs to explore their own heart. It is there that the world is changed, because it is in the human heart that evil begins and its there that evil can be brought to an end.

Deuteronomy 4:1-2. 6-8

The laws of God are a sign of God’s presence and offer us God’s life.

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

Goodness is all gift, because all goodness comes from God as a gift.

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

The Gospel is concerned with uncovering what is hidden, especially the secrets of the human heart.



Reflection

The religious leaders of Israel had developed all kinds of elaborate rituals to separate themselves from people who didn't believe in God. These 'oral traditions' were regarded as having the same binding force as the Law of Moses. Jesus and his disciples were criticized by the religious leaders for their failure to perform the intricate and complicated purification rites.

According to **The Law** this kind of ceremonial washing or purification was required only of the Priests before they entered the sanctuary. By the time of Jesus however the ritual of hand washing before every meal and between each course had been extended to include all pious Jews

Jesus quoted the prophet Isaiah who had faced hypocrisy in his own day. Jesus said that external acts should reflect the moral intent of God's Law and not be mere pious observances. It was not food or any particular thing that defiled a person. It was the sinful **motives** of the heart that led to immoral acts. Jesus asks them to look to the various ways they are living in relationship with other people to see if they are responding to God "**from within**" (with their whole being) or merely with "**lip service**" (with superficial nods to tradition).

We don't know where this encounter in the Gospel took place; or when. Mark, the Gospel writer, is only concerned about evoking the atmosphere that surrounded Jesus. He's got teachers of the Law all around him. These people were scrupulous observers of their traditions; they blindly resisted anything new that Jesus, the prophet of love, wanted to bring into their lives.

The Pharisees showed great indignation when they saw the disciples eat with 'unclean hands'. They could not tolerate this."Why do your disciples not respect the traditions of the elders?" Although they're talking about the disciples, the attack is really aimed at Jesus.

They're right. It is Jesus who is breaking down that blind obedience to traditions and trying to create around him an atmosphere of freedom

in which what matters is to love.



That group of religious teachers hasn't understood anything about the kingdom of God that Jesus is announcing. God does not reign in their hearts. The Law, their rules, usages and customs are marked by "tradition". For them what's important is observing what has been established by the "elders". They're not thinking about the good of the people. They don't care about seeking the kingdom of God and his justice.



This is a serious mistake on their part. So Jesus speaks to them in harsh terms **“You put aside the commandments of God and cling to human traditions”**.

The teachers speak reverently of the “tradition of the elders;” they attribute divine authority to it. But Jesus regards it as is: simply a human tradition. You should never confuse the will of God with what is a product of human invention.

It would be a serious mistake for us, in the church of today, to remain as prisoners of the human traditions of our ancestors when everything is calling us to a profound conversion to Jesus Christ, our

Lord and teacher. What should concern us is not preserving the past intact, but making possible the birth of a church and Christian communities able to reproduce the gospel faithfully and to make the kingdom of God a reality in our own society.

Our main responsibility is not repeating the past, but making possible in our times the acceptance of Jesus Christ without hiding or obscuring him with human traditions, however sacred they may seem.

GOSPEL WORDSEARCH

D	E	S	E	H	S	I	D	O	O	UNCLEAN	HANDS	WASHING	ELDERS
R	O	Z	P	N	E	Z	G	O	R	MARKET	CUPS	POTS	BRONZE
B	R	O	N	Z	T	N	H	F	E	RESPECT	FOOD	HYPOCRITES	ELBOW
S	T	A	F	R	I	C	U	P	S				
S	D	N	A	H	R	N	M	T	P				
R	E	W	S	E	C	B	A	E	E				
E	L	A	O	L	O	H	N	K	C				
D	W	O	E	B	P	S	O	R	T				
L	B	A	B	O	Y	I	T	A	E				
E	N	B	O	W	H	D	L	M	R				

