

SPIRITUALITY

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

James 1:18

R¹. Alleluia, alleluia.

The Father willed to give us birth by the word of truth that we may be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

R². Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23; L125B

When the Pharisees with some scribes who had come from Jerusalem

gathered around Jesus, they observed that some of his disciples ate their meals with unclean, that is, unwashed, hands.

—For the Pharisees and, in fact, all Jews, do not eat without carefully washing their hands, keeping the tradition of the elders. And on coming from the marketplace they do not eat without purifying themselves.

And there are many other things that they have traditionally observed, the purification of cups and jugs and kettles and beds.—

So the Pharisees and scribes questioned him,

“Why do your disciples not follow the tradition of the elders but instead eat a meal with unclean hands?”

He responded,

“Well did Isaiah prophesy about you hypocrites, as it is written: *This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines human precepts.*

You disregard God’s commandment but cling to human tradition.”

Continued in Appendix A, p. 300.

Reflecting on the Gospel

Today’s gospel proclaims an encounter of Jesus with some of his opponents, named as “Pharisees with some scribes who had come from Jerusalem.” Jerusalem was the center of formal opposition to Jesus by those who were fearful of the loss of personal power, overly concerned with the externals of religious appearances, or devoted to censorious inquiry into minor deviations from the established way of doing things religious while ignoring more serious matters.

In this sense, every religious group, in the present as well as the past, has those who “come from Jerusalem”—self-appointed custodians of the orthodox faith.

Traditions are necessary for the identity of any group, both secular (think of sports teams!) and religious. As Eugene LaVerdiere writes: “Traditions are tenacious and important, but they are not absolute, and their value can be questioned. Traditions spring from a particular history. They nourish a community’s ideals, and they in turn are nourished by those ideals.

When a life context that inspired a set of traditions dies or is drastically altered, traditions it once sustained become lifeless and meaningless. That does not mean they are immediately abandoned” (*The Beginning of the Gospel*).

The life context of the early Markan church was being drastically altered by the numbers of Gentiles who were entering into the Christian community. Tension inevitably arose between these new

converts and the Christians whose faith had been nourished in the rich soil of Judaism. Many of the latter felt that the traditions they held dear, and that were reconcilable with following Jesus, had been carelessly trampled down or uprooted by the Gentile Christians to whom such traditions meant little or nothing.

On the other hand, the Gentile Christians felt coerced by what, to them, were meaningless laws and rituals. To reconcile both groups in baptismal freedom and love was an ongoing challenge for community leaders. The “tradition of the elders,” rightly understood, were not an attempt to bury the commands of God under suffocating trivia, but rather to aerate the whole of Jewish life with mindfulness of the people’s identity and responsibilities as God’s people. For the sake of the non-Jewish readers, Mark enumerates some of the traditional rituals of washing that are observed.

Jesus responds to the Pharisees’ challenge about the behavior of his disciples with a quotation from the prophet Isaiah, addressing them as “hypocrites.” Out of the strong Jewish prophetic tradition of self-criticism, Isaiah spoke of religious practices that were on the lips but not in the heart as a superficial and external playacting at true religion. The Pharisees have fallen into the same religious trap of absolutizing their own human traditions of outward observance, not the commands of God. What should be washed is not so much pots and pans and hands, but their own hearts. External rituals have value only insofar as they encourage or express the dedication of our hearts. Before we eat as a eucharistic community, are our hearts clean?

Finally, Jesus tells his disciples that what truly defiles a person does not come from without, from the food that we take into our bodies; what defiles a person



Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time, August 22, 2021

SECOND READING

Eph 5:2a, 25-32

Brothers and sisters:

Live in love, as Christ loved us.

Husbands, love your wives,

even as Christ loved the church

and handed himself over for her to sanctify

her,

cleansing her by the bath of water with the

word,

that he might present to himself the church

in splendor,

without spot or wrinkle or any such thing,

that she might be holy and without blemish.

So also husbands should love their wives as
their own bodies.

He who loves his wife loves himself.

For no one hates his own flesh

but rather nourishes and cherishes it,

even as Christ does the church,

because we are members of his body.

*For this reason a man shall leave his father
and his mother and be joined to his wife,
and the two shall become one flesh.*

This is a great mystery,

but I speak in reference to Christ and the
church.

Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time, August 29, 2021

Gospel (cont.)

Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23; L125B

He summoned the crowd again and said to them,

“Hear me, all of you, and understand.

Nothing that enters one from outside can defile that person;

but the things that come out from within are what defile.

“From within people, from their hearts,

come evil thoughts, unchastity, theft, murder,

adultery, greed, malice, deceit,

licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, folly.

All these evils come from within and they defile.”

Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time, October 3, 2021

Gospel (cont.)

Mark 10:2-16; L140B

And people were bringing children to him that he might touch them,

but the disciples rebuked them.

When Jesus saw this he became indignant and said to them,

“Let the children come to me;

do not prevent them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

Amen, I say to you,

whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child

will not enter it.”

Then he embraced them and blessed them,

placing his hands on them.

or Mark 10:2-12; L140B

The Pharisees approached Jesus and asked,

“Is it lawful for a husband to divorce his wife?”

They were testing him.

He said to them in reply, “What did Moses command you?”

They replied,

“Moses permitted a husband to write a bill of divorce
and dismiss her.”

But Jesus told them,

“Because of the hardness of your hearts
he wrote you this commandment.

But from the beginning of creation, *God made them male and female.*

For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother

and be joined to his wife,

and the two shall become one flesh.

So they are no longer two but one flesh.

Therefore what God has joined together,

no human being must separate.”

In the house the disciples again questioned Jesus about this.

He said to them,

“Whoever divorces his wife and marries another

commits adultery against her;

and if she divorces her husband and marries another,

she commits adultery.”