

TWENTY SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME B2024

Let me start this homily with an observation. All of us like people who are truthful to themselves, that is, those who are not the “flip flop”; those who do not show one face in the morning and another in the evening. We admire those whose behavior and words truly match what they are on the inside. These are people who really are inwardly what they appear to be outwardly. Such people we call them authentic.

Conversely, we dislike and, even, we avoid those who are inauthentic, that is, the “flip flop” and unreliable people. These are people who use charm, lie and manipulation to get what they want and to get where they want to be. The way they appear from the outside is not who they are on the inside.

Most churchgoers and many of us would like to think that we are authentic. Yet, even the best of us fail far too often. We fail because we are not always completely honest with ourselves. We overlook things that should cause us concern in our deepest selves. We convince ourselves that our prayers and devotions make up for the hard work of real change.

Today’s readings shed light upon what we have to seriously consider in order to being truthful to ourselves and authentic before God and our fellows. In the first reading, God, through the mouth of Moses, told the People of Israel that their survival and growth depended upon their behavior. He gave them the Ten Commandments and many other directives that would ensure their future well-being. He also told them that they were not to add or to subtract anything from those laws.

From history, we know that when they were faithful, things went well and they prospered. But, when they were unfaithful, they always suffered personal and national disaster. When they were in exile, not only they suffered tragedies, but they even forgot God’s commandments.

It is here that the Pharisees come into play. The Pharisees were the teachers of the Law. In the beginning, they helped a lot the people to reconnect with God. They re-established the Commandments and laws of God that had been lost and forgotten during the Exile. However, over the years and succeeding generations, the Pharisees began to add other requirements to the prescriptions of the Law. By the time of Jesus, they had added something like 1500 new obligations around what God had originally decreed. With that, they made it impossible for the average person to live a normal, everyday life!

Nevertheless, the Pharisees prided themselves in keeping all the new details. At the same time, they often neglected the truly important laws of God! As all that was not enough, they quickly condemned anyone who lived any other way than what they prescribed.

This is the reason why Jesus challenged them in today’s Gospel as they were criticizing his disciples over the washing of the hands. By doing so, they were hypocrites! “They honored God with their lips, but their hearts were far from Him”.

Their worship was useless because they lived by human precepts and tradition and not by the Law of God!

That moment of challenge was also for Jesus an opportunity to teach us about the interior sins that often reside in the human heart. These are the sins that embarrass us when they break forth in our personal behavior. They are the things that reveal our lack of integrity and truthfulness. They are the things that we don't like to admit about ourselves, but they are part of us nonetheless.

As disciples of Jesus, we must recognize our interior and hidden faults and sins. We must become more honest about ourselves to ourselves. And we must become completely honest with God.

God sees us and knows us for who and what we really are. There can be no masquerade before God. Moreover, the brilliant light of God's truth, His grace and His love reveal the truth that we, so often, deny. As our Lord says, "The truth will set you freed".

If we can respond to God's light, we can become more authentic and truthful to ourselves. We can see the truth and folly of our faults and sins. We can discover their origin within us. We can confess those sins in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. We can apologize to those we have hurt by our behavior.

We can even atone for some of the wrongdoing with positive good works. Some of these are mentioned in the Letter of St. James. They are acts of real generosity for those who are the most poor, disadvantaged, and helpless in our city, our nation, and our world.

So, let us pray for God's revealing light, His grace and His love. May we be "doers of God's word and not hearers only". And may we become more authentically Christ-like every day!

(Adapted from the homily of Msgr. Russell G. Terra in Sunday Homilies: September 1, 2024)

Deuter 4:1-2, 6-8; James 1:17-18, 21b-22, 27; Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23



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