

Read

Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-8

Psalm 15:2-3, 3-4, 4-5

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

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

LIVING THE WORD

Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

August 29, 2021



REFLECTION

A high school sports team organized a service opportunity for their athletes. The team met on a Saturday afternoon to pack boxes of food for a homeless shelter. They gathered around a long table, and before any veggies made it into a box, the coach made the athletes pose for pictures. "Helping the homeless!" the team Facebook post proudly read. The coach continued to take and post pictures, usually interrupting the process to get the perfect staged shot. If you saw the team's social media accounts at the end of the session, you would have thought they ended the issue of hunger altogether! Of course service is an important part of the Christian call, but like the Pharisees in today's Gospel, the coach was more focused on appearing righteous than on caring for those in need. His heart was in it for the publicity, not the poor. Jesus challenges us to know why we do what we do. It is not enough to only "walk the walk." Our hearts must match. This is what it means to live with integrity. Mind, heart, and body all align to live out God's call.



ACTION

Do a good deed for someone in your community—in secret. Don't tweet or snap about it. Don't even tell your friends what you did. Just go through the process of doing a good deed, and then take stock of how your heart feels. Reflect on the deeper motivations for your actions beyond "Someone told me to do it" or "It's the right thing to do." These are good starts, but I bet there's more!

"It is not the actual physical exertion that counts toward a man's progress, not the nature of the task, but the spirit of faith with which it is undertaken."

—St. Francis Xavier

? QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today's readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ Does it feel different doing good deeds if no one is watching?
- ❖ Who or what motivates you to act the way you do?



August 29, 2021

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

LECTIONARY #125B

Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-8

Psalms 15:2-3, 3-4, 4-5

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

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

Prepare for the Word

The following elements may be used by the catechist, teacher, or youth minister to prepare to facilitate today's session with teens. You may integrate this information into the reflection and discussion on today's readings.

Leader's Context

Today's Gospel gets to the heart of a major conflict between the Pharisees and Jesus' disciples: What matters more, our external actions or the intention and relationship behind it? Is ritual purity more important than purity of conscience? Jesus critiques the Pharisees' rituals and worship as something that has fallen into routine, losing its deeper meaning. Relationships are at the heart of our rituals and ought to come before a blind following of tradition. Jesus highlights that sin does not come purely from the outside (things we do or don't do), but rather from within our hearts.

Q FOCUS: *Do not let your rituals become routine.*

Liturgical Calendar Connection

One of the primary themes of the liturgical season of Ordinary Time is to foster our growth as disciples. We take this time to consider what our relationship with Jesus is and how it affects all the other relationships in our life. Our actions should reflect that relationship and help others to be in relationship with God. There are still several weeks of Ordinary Time remaining in this liturgical year. Listen carefully throughout the coming months to the Gospel readings, and consider how what we are called to do as disciples connects with the attitude of our hearts.

Church Teaching Connection

The Church teaches that throughout a lifetime, each person forms his or her own conscience. This process involves the study of Scripture, the Church's teachings, theological writings, and ongoing prayer and discernment. Our formed conscience allows us to mindfully engage Church teaching and act in accordance with our beliefs (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1776-1802).

Hear the Word

Use this resource, a lectionary, or a Bible to proclaim the reading. The book should be held reverently or placed on a lectern. If possible, light a candle that is placed near where the Gospel will be proclaimed. Gesture for teens to stand.

Gospel Acclamation

Use the same musical setting that is used in your parish or at school Masses. Teens may help with music and proclaim the Gospel.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

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

Reader: A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark.

All: Glory to you, O Lord.

All make the sign of the cross on their forehead, lips, and heart.

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.” 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.”

Reader: The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Everyone may be seated.

Reflect on the Word

When beginning the reflection and discussion about today’s readings, first refer to the handout for today. Ask teens what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask teens about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:

► Do you have any rituals with family or friends that you would consider “sacred”? If you didn’t participate in this ritual, would something feel off or incomplete?

► Think about the origin of these rituals—the “why” behind your practice. When you participate in them today, do you have the same intentionality?

In today’s Gospel, a dramatic scene unfolds when Jesus is confronted by the Pharisees. The Pharisees were a sect of Jews living in strict adherence to the Torah, or laws, of God. This group questions why some of Jesus’ disciples do not participate in the tradition of ritually cleansing their hands before meals.

To clarify, Jewish purification rituals are supposed to be about more than just hygiene; they are meant to demonstrate a desire to ritually bless oneself (make oneself clean, pure, and holy) before eating. But Jesus scathingly chastises their line of questioning. The Pharisees focus more on the external sign—eating a meal with unclean hands—than on relationship with God. The words on their lips do not align with what is truly on their heart.

► Think back to your personal example of a family ritual, or use a religious ritual such as the sign of the cross or receiving Communion. Has this ritual ever fallen into being just a routine or lost meaning for you?

When we focus too much on the external and not enough on the internal, we might be doing the “right” thing without a real reason. Our rituals become routines: things that we do without honoring their meaning. This can happen in our rituals with family and friends, but it can also happen with our participation in the sacraments. We need to be mindful of what we are doing, why we are doing it, and how it affects our relationships with others and with God.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus says that we are not defiled by what is on the outside, but by what is on the inside. In other words, while his disciples hands are not ritually purified, they are internally holy and in relationship with God. And that is what matters! This does not mean that all rituals or rules and regulations are empty gestures. Rather, Jesus is reminding us to invest in our relationships and take those rituals we participate in to heart.

► What gets in the way of your full participation (mind, body, and heart) in the rituals in your life?

Jesus also shows through this interaction with the Pharisees that he stands with those who are marginalized and maybe even called sinners, or seen as unclean, by others. Christians are not called to some impossible form of perfection. Christ is in relationship with us regardless of our distraction and sin.

Wrapping It Up

Consider these points to conclude the discussion and reflection. Integrate the thoughts and ideas that surfaced during the discussion as well as the "Church Teaching Connection" on page 18.

Rituals become routine when our words and actions differ from what is on our hearts.

God wants our actions to us to a closer relationship with him and with others.

The sacraments are rituals of the Church that bring us into a deeper relationship with God and others.

Act on the Word

Keeping Our Rituals

For this activity, you will need paper and pens. If you use journals in your group, the teens may use them for this activity.

This activity will help the young people reflect upon their own rituals in their lives and how they affect their relationships.

First, ask the teens to journal about a family or friend ritual that is precious to them. This should be something that would feel "off" if it did not happen. Encourage them to spend a few minutes writing about the origin of this ritual, what meaning it has to them and their loved ones, and why it is so important. They can also reflect on what the ritual symbolizes.

Next, pair the young people with one another, and have them share the story of their ritual with their partner. Each person should practice good listening skills and be respectful of the others' time to share. After hearing one another's stories, the young people should talk about similarities and differences between the two examples. Then they should identify any pitfalls that they see for one another in having this ritual become empty actions. Finish by having each pair brainstorm ideas for retaining the uniqueness of their rituals.

Closing Prayer

Merciful Father,
your Son teaches us to look deep within
to discover that which is the root of all sin.
Give us hearts that desire serious introspection,
so that we may know all that comes from within
might be fitting for your honor and glory.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

For Next Sunday

To help teens prepare for next Sunday's Mass, print, email, or share on a blog or social media the handout found on the next page. The JPG and PDF files are available at www.ltp.org/lwgr. Encourage teens to attend Mass with family or friends.