Homily of 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B (09-02-18)

Moses, in the first reading, invited the people of Israel to hear and observe the statutes and decrees of the Lord. Moses said, "Now, Israel, hear the statutes and decrees which I am teaching you to observe, that you may live…" This invitation is no longer for the Israelites of the Old Testament. The invitation is for us here and now.

Another invitation comes from St. James in the second reading. St. James writes, "Humbly welcome the word that has been planted in you and is able to save your souls. Be doers of the word not only hearers…"

The readings are saying to us: hear the word, listen to it, welcome it, observe it; so that it saves our lives here on earth, and saves our souls in life eternal.

Joshua spoke to the people of Israel about the power of the word of God, "Do not let this book of the law depart from your lips. Recite it by day and by night, that you may carefully observe all that is written in it; then you will attain your goal; then you will succeed" (Joshua 1:8).

Jesus captures our various levels of receptivity and none-receptivity of the word of God in his Parable of the Sower in Luke 8:4-8, 11-15:

"A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path and was trampled, and the birds of the sky ate it up. Some seed fell on rocky ground, and when it grew, it withered for lack of moisture. Some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew with it and choked it. And some seed fell on good soil, and when it grew, it produced fruit a hundredfold." After saying this, he called out, "Whoever has ears to hear ought to hear."

"This is the meaning of the parable. The seed is the word of God. Those on the path are the ones who have heard, but the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts that they may not believe and be saved. Those on rocky ground are the ones who, when they hear, receive the word with joy, but they have no root; they believe only for a time and fall away in time of trial. As for the seed that fell among thorns, they are the ones who have heard, but as they go along, they are choked by the anxieties and riches and pleasures of life, and they fail to produce mature fruit. But as for the seed that fell on rich soil, they are the ones who, when they have heard the word, embrace it with a generous and good heart, and bear fruit through perseverance."

In today's Gospel Jesus was not happy with the Pharisees and the Scribes because their attention was trivial human traditions rather than on love, justice and mercy which are the fruits of hearing and observing the word of God. The Pharisees and the Scribes claimed to be the custodians of the word of God but, unfortunately, their hearts were far from God. Are we hypocrites like the Pharisees and the Scribes? Does the word of God we hear regularly bear fruits of love, justice and mercy in our lives?

Lastly, today's Gospel concludes with a list of vices that keep our hearts from God no matter how our lips honor him. The vices are unchastity, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, and folly. This calls for examination of conscience and repentance.

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