

Homily of Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B, 2021

Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-8; Psalm 15:2-5; James 1:17-18, 21-22, 27; Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

When a child is about to leave home to settle in a different place, every wise parent or guardian takes time to instruct the child on how to embrace his or her new environment and life. Moses did the same. The first reading is his instruction to the Israelites on how to observe God's commandments when they arrive in the Promised Land. Moses said to them, "Now, Israel, hear the statutes and decrees which I am teaching you to observe, that you may live, and may enter in and take possession of the land which the Lord, the God of your fathers, is giving you" (Deuteronomy 4:1). This invitation is no longer for the Israelites of the Old Testament but for us, here and now. We are invited to hear and observe the word of God in order that we may live and take possession of all that God has given us. Not hearing and doing what the word says causes spiritual death, and all kinds of losses.

The invitation continues in the second reading: "Humbly welcome the word that has been planted in you and is able to save your souls. Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deluding yourselves" (James 1:21-22). Regularly, the word is planted in us. The reward of welcoming the word planted in us is salvation. Welcoming the word means hearing the word, and doing the word; that is acting on the word. 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 for eternal life.

Jesus explains the reward of listening and acting on the word, "Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock" (Matthew 7:24-25). In last Sunday's gospel, Jesus says, "The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life" (John 6:63). St. Paul reminds us, "The Gospel did not come to you in word alone, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit" (1 Thessalonians 1:5). He continues, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly" (Colossians 3:16). 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).

Apart from the Ten Commandments, there were 613 Jewish commandments known as Mitzvot. The Jewish custodians of the law emphasized obedience to the Mitzvot more than obedience to the Ten Commandments. In the Mitzvot are some of the rules that Mark states in today's gospel, "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" (Mark 7:3-4). Prophet Isaiah and Jesus call the doctrines human precepts.

Unfortunately, the living word of God is neglected while human precepts are accepted and promoted in politics, economy, education, social, health, and religious circles. The result of this is defilement of hearts. Unfortunately, individuals, families, groups, communities, institutions, churches, nations are continually abandoning the living word of God, and continually preferring human precepts. The result of this is defilement of hearts. More unfortunately, religion, according to St. James in the second reading, which is supposed to be "pure and undefiled before God" is also defiled by human beings' acceptance and teaching human precepts as doctrines. The result of all these defilements of hearts are evil behaviors Jesus mentions in today's gospel, unchastity, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, and folly" (Mark 7:23).

What we need at point of regression is individual and collective realization that "the flesh is of no avail" (John 6:63), that "the wisdom of this world is foolishness in the sight of God" (1 Corinthians 3:19), and that we need to return to the word of God and act on the word.

We conclude with Psalm 19:8-12, "The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul. The decree of the Lord is trustworthy, giving wisdom to the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart. The command of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eye. ... The statutes of the Lord are true, all of them just... By them your servant is warned; obeying them brings much reward."

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