

## Homily of Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B, 2024

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 cause all kinds of losses and spiritual death.

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. Where do we belong in Jesus' explanation of the parable of the sower? The path (where the word was taken away by the devil), or the rock (where the word was taken away by trials), or the thorns (where the word was taken away by anxieties and riches and pleasures of life), or the rich soil, who "when they have heard the word, embrace it with a generous and good heart, and bear fruit through perseverance" (Luke 8:13-15).

Apart from the Ten Commandments, there were 613 Jewish precepts known as Mitzvot. The Jewish custodians of the law emphasized obedience to the Mitzvot more than obedience to the Ten Commandments. The precepts Mark cites in today's gospel are from the Mitzvot: "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).

Like the Pharisees, who were more concerned with humans made precepts and traditions than God's Commandments, our generation prefers to listen to the world than to the living word of God. Thomas a Kempis writes in *The Imitation of Christ*, "Many hear the world more easily than they hear God; they follow the desires of the flesh more readily than the pleasure of God." Listening to and obeying the world cause defilement of heart which Jesus mentions in today's gospel: "unchastity, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, and folly" (Mark 7:23).

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 the last Sunday's gospel, Jesus says, "The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life" (John 6:63). Which is why 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).

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). This is why the psalmist proclaims, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105). The psalmist, also, states, "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" (Psalm 19:7-14). St. James assures us, "But the one who peers into the perfect law of freedom and perseveres, and is not a hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, such a one shall be blessed in what he does" (James 1:25).

Where is my Bible? How much time do I devote to reading the word of God, or to hearing the word of God, or to meditating on the word of God? Do I associate myself with individuals, groups, and programs that can help me grow in the knowledge of the word of God? Can I use some of the time I waste on satisfying the desires of the flesh in embracing the word of God? St. Paul tell us, "Whoever sows sparingly will reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will reap bountifully" (2 Corinthians 9:6). Whoever sows nothing will reap nothing.

Since "the wisdom of this world is foolishness in the sight of God" (1 Corinthians 3:19); "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly" (Colossians 3:16).

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