

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson

Sunday 29th August 2021 - 22nd Sunday in ordinary time

Readings (Year B): 1st: Deuteronomy 4:1-2. 6-8. Psalm: 14. 2nd: James 1:17-18. 21-22. 27. Gospel: Mark 7:1-8. 14-15. 21-23.

These last 18 months we've got used to washing, sanitizing our hands everywhere we enter, and it certainly seems to have made quite a difference to the spread of not just Covid but other germs as well. So the gospel fits in well. But we need to understand something of what had happened both for the Scribes and Pharisees and for Jesus and his disciples in this confrontation.

The Pharisees had elaborated a system of rules and regulations for daily life which had no authority in Scripture, and which they sought to impose on others, **while they neglected God's real commandments**. That is the nub of the matter. The Ten Commandments answer many of the problems that face all societies around the world. They are to help people live as God intended.

Jesus took this opportunity to teach about the real nature of purity and defilement. This is not an attack on all religious observances, many of which Jesus himself practised, but rather puts them in their proper place. No amount of religious observance in itself can be of any avail while we still nurture in our hearts sinful desires.

For Jesus the problem is the human heart; who we are, what we believe; how we respond to life's challenges begins within our hearts, the place where God dwells inside every one of us.

Conversely, the evil we are capable of: the hurt we inflict on others; the degrading of the world that God created, also begins within our hearts – where God is displaced by anger, greed, hatred and all those other failings mentioned by the Lord in the gospel.

Jesus shines his spotlight onto it, and what is revealed is not pretty. The Lord is forthright and direct about the dark forces at work in the human heart. Evil intentions emerge from within us.

We know that within our own selves, and know it only too well, the sin of the world, as we see and read daily the news and happening presented to us.

To truly grasp the “Good News” we have got to understand the ‘bad news’ which scripture tells of the fall of man; original sin, which eloquently explains the darkness and evil in the human condition. Is it not very sadly played out for us as the news comes to us?

Bible Alive today reminds us how understanding all this, the great Russian novelist Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn reflected, “If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds and it was necessary to divide them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being and who is willing to destroy a piece of their own heart?” (‘The Gulag Archipelago’)

That is where Jesus shines the search-light on hearts.

It is why we begin every Mass, as we approach God, looking into our hearts, and acknowledging our sins, our thoughts and our words; in what we have done and what we have failed to do, and we cry to the Lord for his mercy: Kyrie eleison; Christe eleison.

In the hurts, indignities and injustices perpetrated against us, what is often worse than the act itself, is what that act does to us as persons.

We respond with suspicion, cynicism, self-absorption, anger, vengeance.

To be a disciple of Jesus is not to let those things ‘outside’ us displace the grace of God ‘inside’ us, but to let God’s presence transform into compassion and reconciliation the evil that we have encountered ‘outside’ us.

The cry is ever Kyrie eleison; Christe eleison. Lord have mercy.

Canon Philip Dyson

Holy Family Parish www.penzancecatholicchurch.org