

Scripture Background

The Chosen People had a very positive view of God's laws. They accepted them as a gift to help them stay close to God. In today's reading from the Old Testament, Israel is asked to listen to and obey specific decrees given by God. In doing so, they gain a place of honor among the nations and the blessing of life in the Promised Land.

Over the centuries and up to the time of Jesus, more highly detailed and specific laws were added to the original Law found in the Pentateuch. In today's gospel the Pharisees--because of their rigid observance of these highly detailed laws--disturb Jesus. Jesus condemns these religious leaders for criticizing the disciples for failing to observe the laws of the tradition. Jesus warns against being concerned with the outward observance of laws without paying attention to what is within one's heart. Jesus points out that evil intentions come from within.

In today's gospel we learn that Jesus is more concerned with what is inside a person than how a person outwardly follows laws.

Question for Deeper Reflection

1. Do you view obeying God's commands as a burden or a blessing? Explain.



Principles of Morality

Trying to live a moral life does not depend on the strict observance of rules and laws, nor does it rely simply on one's own feelings. Catholics understand that we live a moral life when our attitudes and actions are guided by an informed conscience. The preaching of Christ and the Church, sound religious education, an understanding of scripture, spiritual direction, and the witness and example of other believers all help to inform a person's conscience.

As Christians we look to the example of Jesus Christ when it comes to living a moral life. Following the example of Jesus leads to a life that is guided by God's law of love.

Question for Deeper Reflection

2. Name some outside influences that help to inform your conscience.



The ability to look within our hearts in order to determine what is in keeping with God's desire for us is a life long process. We can help the process with a prayer exercise called an "examination of conscience." Take some quiet time this week to examine your conscience. Ask yourself the following questions or come up with some of your own.

- Have I treated the people in my family, my friends and the people at school with respect?
- Have I cared for my body in a healthy way?
- Have I spent time in prayer this week?
- How can I follow the example of Jesus more closely?

Gospel

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

When the Pharisees and 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 the Jews 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 Jesus,

“Why do your disciples not follow the tradition of the elders but instead eat a meal with unclean hands?”

He responded,

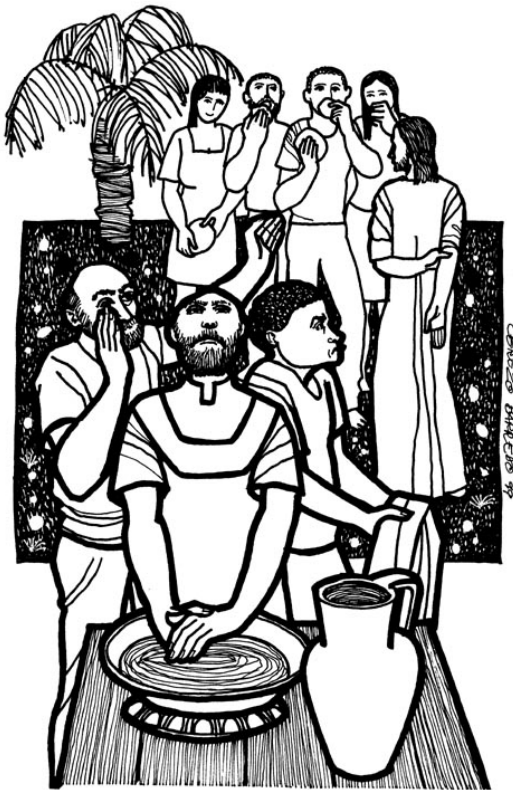
“Well did Isaiah prophesy about you hypocrites, as it is written:

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.”

Jesus 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.”



Reading 1

Dt 4:1-2, 6-8

Moses said to the people:

“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.

In your observance of the commandments of the LORD, your God,

which I enjoin upon you, you shall not add to what I command you nor subtract from it.

Observe them carefully, for thus will you give evidence of your wisdom and intelligence to the nations, who will hear of all these statutes and say, ‘This great nation is truly a wise and intelligent people.’

For what great nation is there that has gods so close to it as the LORD, our God, is to us whenever we call upon him?

Or what great nation has statutes and decrees that are as just as this whole law which I am setting before you today?”