

**Homily – Mark 7: 1-8, 14-15, 21-23**  
**22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B**  
**29<sup>th</sup> August 2021, Sooeey**

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“This people honours me only with lip-service, while their hearts are far from me”.

William Barclay in *The Daily Study Bible* tells the story of an old Jewish rabbi in the Roman prison diagnosed with acute dehydration which would have led to his death. The prison guards insisted that the rabbi had been given his quota of drinking water. So the prison doctor and the officer in charge instructed the guards to watch the rabbi and ascertain what he was doing with his ration of water. They were shocked to find that the rabbi was using almost all his water for traditional ritual washing before prayer and meals.

The Gospel of today explains the encounter of Jesus with the Sanhedrin observers and the Pharisees who had been sent to assess Jesus’ unique, controversial teachings. They had found Jesus’ teachings an open violation of the “Traditions of the Elders,” and judged Jesus’ implied and spoken claims blasphemous. And these tradition-addicted Pharisees started questioning Jesus when His disciples omitted the ritual washing of hands in public before a meal.

For almost 50 years Mother Teresa worked in the slums of Calcutta, India. She worked among the most forsaken people on earth. You and I would recoil from most of the people that she touched every day – the dispossessed, the downtrodden, the diseased, and the desperate. And yet, everybody who met Mother Teresa remarked on her warm smile. She was always so serene in her approach, so caring in her actions. Asked how she could remain so serene, calm and kind throughout her life, she had this to say: “When I was leaving home in Yugoslavia at the age of 18 to become a nun, my mother told me something beautiful and very strange.” She said, ‘You go, put your hand in Jesus’ hand and walk along with him.’” Well, that was the secret of Mother Teresa’s life ever after. Her heart was never far from the Lord; instead she always stayed close to the Lord.

Jesus in today’s Gospel calls the Pharisees ‘hypocrites’. Yes! He reprimanded them, for they could only pay lip-service to God while their hearts were far away. And, Jesus plainly tells them to take their masks off and to open their hearts to the Lord.

T.S. Eliot we know ranks among the great poets of modern times. In one of his most quoted passages he

writes: “The greatest treason is to do the right thing for the wrong reason”.

And that is exactly what we find in the Pharisees in Jesus’ times. In fact, they were regular with their prayers, they fasted, and they gave money to the poor; but they did all these merely for a show. And their reform focused just on two things, namely, a more rigid observance of the Law of Moses and a more rigid observance of human traditions. And often times, it was their rigid observance of human traditions that lead them to perform things for the wrong reason. The endless ritual washings that Jesus refers to in today’s Gospel is one among such traditions. Jesus confronted them for doing many right things, but for the wrong reason.

And worse still, the Pharisees got so caught up in those highly visible human traditions, that, in some cases they even put them ahead of the Law of Moses. And that is why Jesus spoke so bluntly to the Pharisees saying to them: “You put aside the commandment of God to cling to human traditions”.

Now, that brings us to the practical question: “How does this distortion of religion by the Pharisees apply to us today?”

Well! It reminds us that we ought to guard against turning religion into something God never intended it to be, that we must guard against doing or saying things purely out of habit that they even lose their original meaning. Yes! God always wants us to do everything consciously and out of love.

St. James would refer to that in his epistle that we heard today when he says: “It is not enough for us to simply listen to God’s word and deceive ourselves.” And St. Paul makes the same point in his First Letter to the Corinthians when he writes: “I may have all the faith needed to move mountains – but if I have no love, I am nothing. I may give everything I have, but if I have no love, this does me no good. It is love, then that you should strive for.

Now, let me conclude my homily with a little story, a good illustration of doing the right thing for the right reason.

A mother went into the bed room of her 7 year old son, Danney where he was watching TV. She said: “Danney, I am sorry to interrupt, but I need my shoes shined. I have got to run to the hospital in sometime. And I have put the shoes outside on the sidewalk in the backyard.”

Danney slowly got up to get them shined. And when he picked up the first shoe, he noticed something inside it. That was a five dollar bill. And a note attached to it said: “Thanks Danney. This is for you”. And it was signed: “Mom”.

Later, when Danny’s mother slipped her foot into the first shined shoe, she felt something inside that. And she carefully took it out. She was surprised; it was Danny’s dollar bill. And a note was attached to it which read: “Thank you Mom”. But I shined your shoes not for money – but out of love”. ‘Danney’.

Dear Brothers and Sisters, “Let all that we do, be done in love”. God bless you all, **Amen.**