

Daily Reading & Meditation

Out of the Heart Come Evil Thoughts

SUNDAY 29 AUGUST 2021 GOSPEL READING: Mark 7:1-8, 14-15,

1 Now when the Pharisees gathered together to him, with some of the scribes, who had come from Jerusalem, 2 they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands defiled, that is, unwashed. 3 **(For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they wash their hands, observing the tradition of the elders; 4 and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they purify themselves; and there are many other traditions which they observe, the washing of cups and pots and vessels of bronze.)** 5 And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with hands defiled?" 6 And he said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honours me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; 7 in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.' 8 You leave the commandment of God, and hold fast the tradition of men."

14 And he called the people to him again, and said to them, "Hear me, all of you, and understand: 15 there is nothing outside a man which by going into him can defile him; but the things which come out of a man are what defile him."

21 For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, 22 coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. 23 All these evil things come from within, and they defile a man."

Meditation: Which is more important to God - clean hands or a clean mind and heart? The Scribes and Pharisees were upset with Jesus because he allowed his disciples to break with their ritual traditions by eating with unclean hands. They sent a delegation all the way from Jerusalem to Galilee to bring their accusation in a face-to-face confrontation with Jesus. Jesus dealt with their accusation by going to the heart of the matter - by looking at God's intention and purpose for the commandments.

Allow God's word to shape your heart and intentions

Jesus explains that they void God's command because they allow their hearts and minds to be clouded by their own notions of what is true religion. Jesus accuses them specifically of two things. First of hypocrisy. Like actors, who put on a show, they appear to obey God's word in their external practices while they inwardly harbor evil desires and intentions.

Allow God's word to change your way of thinking

Secondly, he accuses them of abandoning God's word by substituting their own arguments and ingenious interpretations for what God requires. They devised clever arguments based on their own thoughts rather than on God's word. Jesus refers them to the prophecy of Isaiah (29:31) where the prophet accuses the people of his day for honouring God with their lips while their hearts were far away from choosing and doing what God asked of them.

Uproot wrong thoughts and attitudes before they grow

Where does evil spring from and what's the solution for eliminating it from our lives? Jesus deals with this issue in response to the religious leaders' concern with ritual defilement - making oneself unfit to offer acceptable sacrifice and worship to God. The religious leaders were concerned with avoiding ritual defilement, some no doubt out of fear of God, and others out of fear of pleasing other people.

Jesus points his listeners to the source of true defilement - evil desires which come from inside a person's

innermost being. Sin does not happen. It first springs from the innermost recesses of our thoughts and intentions, from the secret desires which only the individual soul can conceive.

Only Jesus can free us from sin and guilt

God in his mercy sent his Son Jesus Christ to free us from our sinful cravings and burden of guilt, and to restore us to wholeness of life and goodness. But to receive his mercy and healing, we must admit our faults and ask for his forgiveness. *"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:8-9).

Let Jesus be the master of your heart and desires

When Cain was jealous of his brother, Abel, God warned him to guard his heart: *"Sin is couching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it"* (Genesis 4:7). Do you allow any sinful desires to enter the door of your heart and mind? We do not need to entertain or give in to sinful desires or thoughts, but instead, through the grace of God, we can choose to put them to death rather than allow them to be the master who controls our way of thinking, feeling, and acting.

The Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness

Only God can change our hearts and make them clean and whole through the power of the Holy Spirit. Like a physician who probes the wound before treating it, God through his Word and Spirit first brings to light our sinful condition that we may recognize sin for what it is and call upon God's mercy and pardon. The Lord is ever ready to change and purify our hearts through his Holy Spirit who dwells within us. His power and grace enables us to choose what is good and to reject what is evil. Do you believe in the power of God's love to change and transform your heart?

Psalm 15:1-5

1 O LORD, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill?
 2 He who walks blamelessly, and does what is right, and speaks truth from his heart;
 3 who does not slander with his tongue, and does no evil to his friend, nor takes up a reproach against his neighbour;
 4 in whose eyes a reprobate is despised, but who honours those who fear the LORD; who swears to his own hurt and does not change;
 5 who does not put out his money at interest, and does not take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things shall never be moved.

OPENING PRAYER Lord Jesus, fill me with your Holy Spirit and make my heart like yours - on fire with love and holiness. Strengthen my will that I may always choose to love what is good and to reject what is evil. **Amen.**

CLOSING PRAYER:- Loving God, at this time of crisis when so many are suffering, we pray for our nation and our world.

Give our leaders wisdom, our Health Service strength, our people hope.

Lead us through these parched and difficult days to the fresh springs of joy and comfort that we find in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**