

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON (or a hymn) Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I cry to you all the day long. O Lord, you are good and forgiving, full of mercy to all who call to you.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM (Ps 14)

ANTIPHON: The just will live in the presence of the Lord.

RESPONSE: **The just will live in the presence of the Lord.**

LECTOR: Lord, who shall dwell on your holy mountain? He who walks without fault; he who acts with justice and speaks the truth from his heart. **R.**

LECTOR: He who does no wrong to his brother, who casts no slur on his neighbour, who holds the godless in disdain, but honours those who fear the Lord. **R.**

LECTOR: He who keeps his pledge, come what may; who takes no interest on a loan and accepts no bribes against the innocent. Such a man will stand firm for ever. **R.**

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION Alleluia, alleluia! The Father gave us birth by his message of truth, that we might be as the first fruits of his creation. Alleluia!

COMMUNION ANTIPHON (or a hymn) How great is the goodness, Lord, that you keep for those who fear you.

Or

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God. Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

TODAY'S READINGS Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-8; James 1:17-18, 21-22, 27; Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

NEXT WEEK (23rd Sunday of Year B) Isaiah 35:4-7; Psalm 145; James 2:1-5; Mark 7:31-37

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What's in our hearts matter



1 September 2024 22nd Sunday Year B

Having observed that Jesus' disciples were not complying with the religious purification laws of the time which required one to wash one's hands thoroughly before eating, the Pharisees challenged Jesus once again.

Not following those laws meant that the disciples were eating with hands that were deemed to be "unclean" or "impure". The Pharisees were infuriated Jesus appeared to be unconcerned about this matter of ritual purification.

"You hypocrites," Jesus replied. "You disregard God's commandment but cling to human tradition." The hand-washing law, he implied, is a human tradition, a man-made regulation. Jesus threw the challenge back at them: ritual purity is not a matter of cleaning one's hands, he insists, but of purity of heart! He explains: "Nothing that enters one from outside can defile that person; but the things that come out from within are what defile."

By Jesus' time, the rabbis had identified 613 commands that were prescribed in the Torah (the first five books of the Bible), not just the 10 commandments given to Moses. It was the impossible burden of compliance with all 613 commands that prompted the Pharisees, on another occasion, to ask Jesus which was the greatest commandment. With simplicity and clarity, he replied: love God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind, and love your neighbour as yourself. It is love that is commanded of us as his followers.

Jesus' challenge to the religious leaders also applies to us and to the Church in our time. Jesus firstly challenges all of us as Church to reflect very carefully on the rules and regulations we set before people. Are they God's commandments? Or are they human constructs? Are they in fact burdens that we have imposed on people? Might some of our rules and regulations actually impede people's progress on their faith journey? The rules may be well-intentioned, but they might also be misguided, not in fact closely aligned to God's commands.

Jesus leaves us in no doubt as to what really matters: it is what is in and comes from our hearts. It is, as the Psalmist says, a matter of justice. "One who does justice will live in the presence of the Lord." Here is the benchmark! It is justice.

Justice pertains to the way we live our daily lives, how we relate to others; it is right judgement, right intention and right action in all of our dealings.

What I want, says God to the prophet Hosea, is mercy. As Jesus stressed, it is a pure heart that is demanded of us; a heart that lives justly, shows mercy, responds compassionately and loves tenderly. The Letter of James echoes the same message: "Be doers of the word and not hearers only."

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