

## 22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year B

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### Sources:

SCB: ([St Charles](#))

JPII: (JPII – [2/4/04](#))

RC: ([Cantalmessa](#))

S: ([Sacerdos](#))

SH: ([David Scott & Scott Hahn](#))

S:

- **THEME OF THE READINGS** - The clear central theme running through this Sundays' Readings is the law of God, the source of real wisdom and the fountain of life. To know it is to possess the only truly superior knowledge available to humans. But it is necessary to go beyond mere knowledge, welcoming the divine word and acting on it. We must not allow human small-mindedness to pervert our understanding and wholehearted embrace of the law that comes to us as the most kind gift of the Father. Though one can speak of the divine law in a broader context, what is clearly at issue in the texts here is the moral law, stemming from God's eternal plan and from the demands of the gospel.

### 1st Reading - Deuteronomy 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?"

SCB:

- On the plains of Moab, God charges Moses, now close to death, once more to proclaim the Law which he received through the revelation on Mount Sinai. This proclamation is contained in the fifth and last book of the Pentateuch, is called in Hebrew *had-debharim* (the words) and in Greek *deuteronomion* (second law). Moses is addressing a new generation of Israelites, all of whom would have been under the age of 20 when the Exodus began. By having the Law restated again, Yahweh is reminding

them that His covenant with Israel is made with all generations (29:13), both present and future: it is an everlasting covenant. This proclamation could almost be called an encyclical of Pope Moses – there is no new revelation, only restatement with, in some cases, a relaxation of the requirements. Today's reading is taken from Moses' first address and is called "The Prologue to the Promulgation of the Law to All Israel."

**Psalm 15:2-3, 3-4, 4-5**

Whoever walks blamelessly and does justice; who thinks the truth in his heart and slanders not with his tongue.

Who harms not his fellow man, nor takes up a reproach against his neighbor; by whom the reprobate is despised, while he honors those who fear the LORD.

Who lends not his money at usury and accepts no bribe against the innocent. Whoever does these things shall never be disturbed.

JPII:

- Psalm 15 that is presented for our reflection is often classified by biblical scholars as part of an "entrance" liturgy. Like several other compositions in (Psalms 23; 25; 94), it prompts us to imagine a sort of procession of the faithful jostling to pass through the door of the Temple of Zion to have access to worship. An ideal dialogue between the faithful and the Levites outlines the indispensable conditions for admittance to the liturgical celebration, hence, to intimacy with God.
- The conditions required for entering the sacred hall were sometimes engraved on the façades of Egyptian and Babylonian temples. But there is a significant difference compared to those suggested by our Psalm. Many religious cultures require above all for admittance to the divinity an external ritual purity which entails special ablutions, gestures and garb.
- Psalm 15, instead, demands a clear conscience so that the person's decisions may be devoted to love of justice and of one's neighbour. Therefore, we can feel in these verses the vibrant spirit of the prophets who continually invite people to combine faith and life, prayer and existential commitment, adoration and social justice (cf. Is 1: 10-20; 33: 14-16; Hos 6: 6; Mi 6: 6-8; Jer 6: 20).
- Let us listen, for example, to the admonition of the Prophet Amos who in God's name denounces worship that is detached from daily history: "I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings... I will not accept them, and the peace offerings of your fatted beasts I will not look upon.... But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Am 5: 21-22, 24).
- 11 requirements are listed by the Psalmist, which can constitute the basis for a personal examination of conscience every time we prepare ourselves to confess

our sins in order to be admitted to communion with the Lord in the liturgical celebration.

- The first three conditions are of a general kind and express an ethical choice: to follow the path of moral integrity, to do what is right and, lastly, to speak with perfect sincerity (cf. Ps 15: 2).
- Three duties follow. We could describe them as relations with our neighbour: to abstain from slander, to avoid every action that could harm our brethren and to refrain every day from reproaching those who live beside us (cf. v. 3). Then comes the request for a clear choice of position in the social context: to despise the reprobate, to honour those who fear God. Finally, a list follows of the last three precepts on which to make an examination of conscience: to keep one's word or an oath faithfully, despite damaging consequences for ourselves; not to practise usury, a scourge that is also a reality in our time and has a stranglehold on many peoples' lives; and lastly, to avoid all forms of corruption in public life, another commitment that we should also be able to practise rigorously today (cf. v. 5).
- Following this path of authentic moral choices means being ready to meet the Lord. In his *Sermon on the Mount*, Jesus also proposed his essential "entrance" liturgy: "If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Mt 5: 23-24).
- St Hilary of Poitiers, a fourth-century Father and Doctor of the Church, comments on the Psalm's finale, linking it to the initial image of the tent of the temple of Zion: "Acting in accordance with these precepts, we dwell in the tent and rest on the mountain. May the preservation of the precepts and the work of the commandments, therefore, endure unchanged. This Psalm must be anchored in our inmost depths, it must be engraved on our hearts, stored in our memories; the treasure of its rich brevity must confront us night and day. Thus, having acquired its riches on our way towards eternity and dwelling in the Church, we will be able to rest at last in the glory of Christ's Body"

### **2nd Reading - James 1:17-18, 21-22, 27**

All good giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no alteration or shadow caused by change. He willed to give us birth by the word of truth that we may be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

Humbly welcome the word that has been planted in you and is able to save your souls.

Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deluding yourselves.

Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

#### SCB:

- The name James was very common, up to five men are called James in the New Testament:
  - James, son of Zebedee, called “the greater” (Matthew 10:2; Luke 8:51; Acts 1:13; 12:2)
  - James, son of Alphaeus, also an apostle, called “the less” (Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13)
  - James, “the brother of the Lord” (Galatians 1:19; Matthew 13:55, Mark 6:3)
  - James, apostle and Bishop of Jerusalem (Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; Galatians 1:19)
  - James, to whom the risen Jesus appeared (1 Corinthians 15:17).
- Scholars generally agree that “the brother (cousin) of the Lord” is the Bishop of Jerusalem to whom the risen Lord appeared. This narrows the field down to three Jameses: James the greater, James the less, and James the Lord’s brother and Bishop of Jerusalem.
- James the greater was martyred by Herod Agrippa around A.D. 44 (Acts 12:12) and it’s unlikely that he could have been the author of this letter. Regarding the two remaining Jameses, we cannot be sure that they were one and the same person but the likelihood is that they were. In fact Luke and Paul, after the death of James the greater, make reference only to one James, the Bishop of Jerusalem and brother of the Lord (Acts 12:17; Galatians 2:9,12).
- It is fairly clear that the letter was written by James, the Lord’s brother and Bishop of Jerusalem, who was probably also known as James the less, son of Alphaeus, listed in the Gospels as an apostle (Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18). James the Bishop of Jerusalem was martyred around the year 62 at the instigation of the high priest, Annas II.

#### **Gospel - Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23**

When the Pharisees with 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 they 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 him, "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."

He 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."

RC:

- Jesus cuts at the root the tendency to give more importance to external gestures and rites than to the heart's dispositions, the desire to appear better than one is, in short, hypocrisy and formalism.
- But today we can draw from this page of the Gospel a teaching not only of an individual order but also social and collective. The distortion that Jesus criticized, of giving more importance to external cleanliness than to purity of heart, is reproduced today on a worldwide scale.
- There is very much preoccupation about exterior and physical contamination from the atmosphere, the water, the hole in the ozone layer; instead, there is almost absolute silence about interior and moral defilement.
- We are indignant on seeing marine birds emerging from waters contaminated with petroleum stains, covered with tar and unable to fly, but we do not show the same concern for our children, vitiated and spent at an early age because of the mantle of wickedness that already extends to every aspect of life.
- The struggle against physical contamination and care of hygiene is a sign of progress and civilization which must not be given up at any price. However, Jesus told us, on that occasion, that it was not enough for us to wash our hands, our vessels and all the rest; this does not go to the root of the problem.
- Jesus then launches the program of an ecology of the heart. Let us take some of the "defiling" things enumerated by Jesus: slander with the related vice of saying evil things about one's neighbor.
- Do we really want to undertake the task of healing our hearts? If so, we must engage in an all out battle against the habit of gossiping, of criticizing, of murmuring against absent persons, of making quick judgments. This is a most difficult poison to neutralize once it has spread.
- Once a woman went to confession to St. Philip Neri, accusing herself of having spoken badly of some people. The saint absolved her, but gave her a strange penance. He told her to go home, to get a chicken and return to him, plucking its feathers along the way. When she was in his presence again, he said to her: "Now go back home and collect one by one the feathers that you let fall when you were coming here."

"Impossible!" exclaimed the woman. "In the meantime the wind has dispersed

them in all directions." That's the point St. Philip wished to make.

"Now you see -- he said -- how it is impossible to take back murmuring and slander once they have left the mouth."

Aquinas:

- The people of the land of Gennesareth, who seemed to be unlearned men, not only come themselves, but also bring their sick to the Lord, that they may but succeed in touching the hem of His garment. But the Pharisees and Scribes, who ought to have been the teachers of the people, run together to the Lord, not to seek for healing, but to move captious questions. (Bede – [02/18/09](#))
- Wonderful is the folly of the Pharisees and Scribes; they accuse the Son of God, because He keeps not the traditions and precepts of men. (Jerome – [11/07/07](#) & [11/14/07](#)) + ([Spiritus Paraclitus](#) (*encyclical*) – Pope Benedict XV – 9/15/20)
- For taking the spiritual words of the Prophets in a carnal sense, they observed, by washing the body alone, commandments which concerned the chastening of the heart and deeds. It is therefore a superstitious human tradition, that men who are clean already, should wash oftener because they eat bread, and that they should not eat on leaving the market, without washing. But it is necessary for those who desire to partake of the bread which comes down from heaven, often to cleanse their evil deeds by alms, by tears, and the other fruits of righteousness. It is also necessary for a man to wash thoroughly away the pollutions which he has contracted from the cares of temporal business, by being afterwards intent on good thoughts and works. In vain, however, do the Jews wash their hands, and cleanse themselves after the market, so long as they refuse to be washed in the font of the Saviour; in vain do they observe the washing of their vessels, who neglect to wash away the filthy sins of their bodies and of their hearts. (Bede)
- For the Jews, boasting themselves to be the portion of God, call common those meals which all men use, as shellfish, hares, and animals of that sort. Not even however what is offered to idols is unclean, in as far as it is food and God's creature; it is the invocation of devils which makes it unclean; and He adds the cause of it, saying, "Because it entereth not into his heart." The principal seat of the soul according to Plato is the brain, but according to Christ, it is in the heart. (Bede)
- It says therefore into his heart, that is, into his mind, which is the principal part of his soul, on which his whole life depends; wherefore it is necessary, that according to the state of his heart a man should be called clean or unclean, and thus whatsoever does not reach the soul, cannot bring pollution to the man. Meats therefore, since they do not reach the soul, cannot in their own nature defile a man; but an inordinate use of meats, which proceeds from a want of order in the mind, makes men unclean. But that meats cannot reach the mind, He shews by that which He adds, saying, "But into the belly, and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats." This however He says, without referring to what

remains from the food in the body, for that which is necessary for the nourishment and growth of the body remains. But that which is superfluous goes out, and thus as it were purges the nourishment, which remains. (St Thomas Aquinas – [06/02/10](#) & [06/16/10](#))

- For some things are joined to others in such a way as both to change and be changed, just as food, losing its former appearance, is both itself turned into our body, and we too are changed, and our strength is refreshed by it. Further, a most subtle liquid, after the food has been prepared and digested in our veins, and other arteries, by some hidden channels, called from a Greek word, pores, passes through us, and goes into the draught. (Augustine – [8/25/10](#) + [1/9/08](#), [1/16/08](#), [1/30/08](#), [2/20/08](#), & [2/27/08](#))
- Thus then it is not meat that makes men unclean, but wickedness, which works in us the passions which come from within. (Bede)
- The meaning of which He points out, when He subjoins, "for from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts." And thus it appears that evil thoughts belong to the mind, which is here called the heart, and according to which a man is called good or bad, clean or unclean. (Aquinas)
- From this passage are condemned those men who suppose that thoughts are put into them by the devil, and do not arise from their own evil will. The devil may excite and help on evil thoughts, he cannot be their author. (Bede)
- From evil thoughts, however, evil actions proceed to greater lengths, concerning which it is added, adulteries, that is, acts which consist in the violation of another man's bed; fornications, which are unlawful connexions between persons, not bound by marriage; murders, by which hurt is inflicted on the person of one's neighbour; thefts, by which his goods are taken from him; covetousness, by which things are unjustly kept; wickedness, which consists in calumniating others; deceit, in overreaching them; lasciviousness, to which belongs any corruption of mind or body. (Aquinas)
- Or, foolishness consists in wrong thoughts concerning God; for it is opposed to wisdom, which is the knowledge of divine things. It goes on: "All these evil things come from within, and defile the man." For whatsoever is in the power of a man, is imputed to him as a fault, because all such things proceed from the interior will, by which man is master of his own actions. (Aquinas)