Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)

Gospel text (*Mk* 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.”

«You disregard God’s commandment but cling to human tradition»

Fr. Josep Lluís SOCÍAS i Bruguera
(Badalona, Barcelona, Spain)

Today, the Word of the Lord helps us to discern that over and above our human usages we have to place God's Commandments. In fact, as time goes by, it is easy for us to distort the evangelic advice and, willingly or not, replace the Commandments or engulf them in a punctilious meticulousness: “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…” (Mk 7:4). This is why plain people, with their typical common sense, paid little attention to the doctors of the Law or to the Pharisees, who were putting more emphasis on their human speculations than on God's Word. To the religious hypocrite Jesus applies Isaiah's prophetic complaint (“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": Mk 7:6).

When St. John Paul II expressed his sorrow in the name of the Church for all the negative things that her children had done throughout history, he did it by saying «we have been separated from the Gospel».

Jesus tells us: "Nothing that enters one from outside can defile that person; but the things that come out from within are what defile" (Mk 7:15). What comes out of a man's heart, from a person's conscious seclusion, is what can make us bad. This malice is what harms Mankind and us specifically. Religiosity does not consist precisely in washing our hands (remember Pilate who delivers Jesus Christ to be crucified!), but in keeping our heart pure.

Speaking positively, this is what St. Therese of Lisieux tells us in her Biographic Manuscripts: "Considering the mystical body of the Church (...) I understood that the Church had a Heart and that this Heart was burning with love". From a loving heart springs the well done deeds that help precisely those who really need help ("For I was hungry and you gave me food..." Mt 25:35).

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- "In vain do they wash their hands and purify themselves outwardly, unless they do so in the Savior's fountain" (Saint Bede the Venerable)

- "Love gives impulse and fruitfulness to life and to the journey of life: without love, both life and faith remain sterile" (Francis)

- "The passions are natural components of the human psyche; they form the passageway and ensure the connection between the life of the senses and the life of the mind. Our Lord called man's heart the source from which the passions spring (Cf. Mk 7:21)" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 1764)