

22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday Homily: "Hear me and understand, Being unclean depends on your heart, not on your diet"

Jesus wants the people to *really understand* what cleanness and uncleanness mean and how the scribes and Pharisees show hypocrisy in their definitions and applications. Their teaching disrespects God and harms the people both physically and spiritually. Physically, their added traditions create a burden of time and resources God never intended. It is spiritually harmful because they teach the people that following extra-scriptural tradition is more important than their heart's attitude.

In their zeal to keep the Mosaic Law, the scribes and Pharisees over-emphasize manmade traditions to the point that they nullify the law. They obsess over ceremonial uncleanness in fear that they may accidentally eat unclean food and, thereby, become unclean themselves. Jesus explains their foolishness; *whether you are unclean as a person is dependent on your heart, not your diet.*

"Heart" is from the Greek root word *kardia*. It is the core of our being from which our desires, thoughts, and judgments come. *Our actions reveal the state of our hearts, they do not define our hearts.* A hardened heart will cause a person to indulge in the evil deeds listed in the gospel. "Evil" is from the Greek root word *kakos* and means inappropriate, harmful, or bad. When the scribes and Pharisees teach the people that it is more important to fulfill an oath than care for their parents, they do so after careful, but hard-headed, deliberation.

This passage suggests a very important distinction between having an evil intent and being the victim of evil. A person is unclean, if their heart pushes them into sin. A person is not necessarily unclean if they are the victim of evil. The shame of a victim of molestation or any other evil action is not from God. God does not see the person as damaged or sinful or unclean.

Too often many Christians leap into teaching and serving roles before they have studied well what they believe. There are few things more dangerous for

a Christian than trying to defend the gospel without understanding it. Jesus' call to *hear and understand* applies to all of us.

In this context, we spent some time in the past weeks to understand better Jesus' real presence in the Eucharist, and how we need to better prepare for it. Today's gospel helps us to become constantly aware of how important for us to participate/ approach/ receive the holy communion with a clean heart. Remember Jesus' insistence that we must have clean hearts/ reconciled hearts as we come to offer sacrifice: "*So 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, first go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and make your offering to God*".

Brothers and sisters, the Sacrament of Mercy-that we call the sacrament of *reconciliation*- is important for us for a worthy preparation and fruitful celebration of the Holy Eucharist that we can receive the most holy Body and Blood of Christ in a most worthy manner. Amen.