

Gratitude Foundation



*“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?
Has only this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?”*

(Lk. 17:15-17)

The Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time—Year B

Fr. Glenn Joseph Theoret
Executive Director

www.gratitudefoundation.us
frglenn@gratitudefoundation.us

3713 County 416 20th Road
Gladstone, MI 49837

“In all things give thanks, it is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”

(1 Thess: 5:18)

Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading 1

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?"

Responsorial Psalm

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

R. (1a) The one who does justice will live in the presence of the Lord.

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

R. The one who does justice will live in the presence of the Lord.

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.

R. The one who does justice will live in the presence of the Lord.

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

R. The one who does justice will live in the presence of the Lord.

Reading 2

James 1:17-18, 21b-22, 27

Dearest brothers and sisters:

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.

Alleluia

James 1:18

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

The Father willed to give us birth by the word of truth
that we may be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

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."

Exegesis

Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-8

The first thing that I do when provided noncontiguous verses is to open my bible and read the omitted verses, out of curiosity if nothing else, but more importantly to understand the context of the pericope at hand. Verses 3-5 are as follows: ³You have seen with your own eyes what the Lord did at Baal-peor: the Lord, your God, destroyed from your midst everyone that followed Baal of Peor, ⁴but you, who clung to your God, are all alive today. ⁵Therefore, I teach you the statutes and decrees as the Lord, my God, has commanded me, that you may observe them in the land that you are entering to occupy.

The setting is Moses speaking to the people as he was about to ascent Mount Horeb to encounter Yahweh and to receive the Ten Commandments and to enter a covenantal relationship with the Lord. Living in right relationship with God and others as prescribed in the Decalogue is necessary to live in the Promised Land. The backdrop of the time was infidelity and rampant idolatry of the people. At Baal-peor it manifested itself in prostitution and sexual promiscuity. The worship of Baal included rituals of drunken orgies. It was enticing and luring to the innate concupiscence within. Yahweh is calling them to rise above their sinful human nature and giving them a code to live by.

God is also calling them to be a light for the nations. God has chosen them as a particular people set apart to live in a very personal covenantal relationship with Him for a purpose. That purpose is to reveal Himself to all of humanity through them. He is asking that His love, His statutes and decrees be passed down through the generations of their children and their children's children (see verse 9).

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

Psalm 15 is entitled *The Righteous Israelite, A Psalm of David*. It consists of 5 verses all of which are included today as verse 1 is the refrain. One translation of verse 1 is as follows: "Lord, who may abide in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy mountain?" Verses 2-5 answer that question. It is whoever acts in a righteous way before God, i.e., one who walks without fault, who does what is just, who speaks the truth, who does not slander or wrong a neighbor. The bottom line is that we cannot love God without loving our neighbor who is also a child of God.

James 1:17-18, 21b-22, 27

Our scripture passage today from *The Letter of Saint James* captures specific verses from the first chapter. As is the case with many prologues and introductions, chapter one provides an overview of the themes developed in the rest of the letter. These include encouragement during trial (1:2-4; 5:7-11), the need for wisdom (1:5; 3:13-18), the necessity of faith (1:5-8; 5:13-18), the treatment of the rich and poor (1:9-11; 2:1-7; 4:13-5:6), the call to put faith into action (1:22-25; 2:14-26), and the need for a controlled tongue (1:26; 3:1-12).¹

Note that our chosen pericope tends to skirt this introductory outline and reveals the foundational truths necessary to achieve what James is promoting in the entirety of his letter. The truth is that the Spirit of God has been planted in the hearts of the baptized for those who open themselves to the gift, the gift that we call grace. That gift has the ability to enlighten the soul and to inspire the human soul to live life in certain way. It gives us encouragement during trial, it gives us wisdom for life, it is the seed of faith, it does not distinguish between rich or poor, it empowers us to put our faith into action and to control and guide our speech.

Exegesis (Continued)

James 1:17-18, 21b-22, 27

These verses were chosen for our liturgy today to provide a backdrop and contrast to the seeds of evil and darkness that Jesus points out in the gospel. The seeds of good and the seeds of evil exist in every human soul. The sparks of divinity exist from the reality of creation, formed by God in His own image and likeness and infused with divine life at baptism. The seeds of evil have been inherited by the fall of humanity and immersion into a world of sin and death. The battle of good and evil, of light and darkness is fought in the depth of every individual human soul.

Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

The encounter with the Pharisees and Scribes that came to Jesus from Jerusalem follows a series of miracles performed by Jesus, i.e. the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus walking on water, and a series of healings at Gennesaret. His fame is obviously starting to spread and now He is confronted with alleged ritual law violations by his disciples. Earlier they were attacking Him and now His disciples.

Jesus reveals their hypocrisy. Knowing their hearts and their malice seems to move Him with concern and compassion. The Greek word that we translate as *hypocrisy* is *hypokrites*. It describes an actor whose face is hidden behind a mask. Of course, Jesus could see behind the mask as He could see their face and He knew their hearts. Jesus also removes the “mask” to reflect or mirror to us reality of our fallen human nature. It is a reality that is a part of our nature, a part of our DNA. It is something that we cannot change, but we can rise above with the help of God’s grace.

The Scribes and the Pharisees had promulgated 613 laws upon the foundation of the Ten Commandments. In a predominately oral society, the task of memorizing such a code must have been daunting. As it were, the Scribes and Pharisees were known for their hypocrisy of imposing laws that they themselves were not adhering to.

At a deeper level Jesus is drawing us beyond the eternal rituals that sometimes keep us living on the surface. *Their worship of Me is empty*. As Jesus quotes the Prophet Isaiah it is interesting to look at that original Hebrew text. It reads as follows: “their worship of Me is a human commandment learned by rote.”¹ Of this, Job provides a good lesson from Scripture. Job was a model God fearing man who lived to the letter of the law. It was only in great trial and distress that Job progresses into a personal encounter and relationship with God.

By abandoning the command of God: The participle “abandoning” (*aphentes*) modifies the verb “hold on to,” which emphasizes the causal connection between observance of human doctrines and neglect of the divine command. “Command” (*entole*) is used by Mark only here (vv. 8, 9) and in 10:5, 19; 12:28, 31. In every case the citation is from the Pentateuch, and each citation contains the central belief of Israel. In 12:29 the *Shema* is called by Jesus the prime commandment (*entole*) to which is joined the command to love neighbor (12:28-31). At stake in the dispute is what really constitutes fidelity to God’s revelation versus human tradition.² Recall the words of Moses in our first reading this weekend: “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.” (Deut 4:2).

1. Donahue, Harrington; Sacra Pagina Series, The Gospel of Mark; L.P.; Collegeville, MN; page 222.

2. Ibid.

Reflection

For the past six weeks we have been reading from the beautiful *Bread of Life Discourse* of John's Gospel. The Word of God encouraged us each week to reflect on the amazing gift of God's life that He desires to share with us. As we concluded our reading of the discourse this past weekend the focus turned from the gift itself to our response to the gift. Love must be free, or it would not be love. The gift of God's life is offered to us in a very personal way through the gift of His Son, Jesus. Each one of us must make the personal choice with all our minds and with all our hearts and with all of our soul and with all of our strength to accept or reject the amazing gift that God offers to us, the gift of the fullness of life, life eternal. Now as we journey with Jesus week after week the perspective of the Word of God turns more and more toward our response to God's love.

Our readings this weekend remind us that the seeds of God's Word are planted in our hearts. Jesus in turn calls our attention to the seeds of evil that are also planted deep within us. The seeds of goodness come from the source of our being, God Himself. The seeds of evil originate from the devil and what we call original sin. The seeds of evil reflect our fallen human nature. These diametrically opposing forces are pulling us in two directions. One force is pulling us toward God and light and all that is good. The other power is pulling us toward Satan and darkness and all that is evil. Where we live our lives and what Spirit we allow to live in our hearts determines which direction we will go.

One of my favorite stories that survives from Native American spirituality is the story called the *White and Black Wolf*. One day a young boy was struggling with these two opposing forces within himself. He talked to his grandfather, the great and wise chief of the tribe. His grandfather listened to the boy talk of his inner turmoil between good and evil. The wise grandfather responded: "My son, it is like there are two wolves fighting deep within your heart. One wolf is a beautiful white wolf. He is fighting for all that is good and beautiful and happy and truthful. The other wolf is an ugly mean black wolf. He is fighting for everything that is evil and dark and empty and false." The boy looked with a perplexed look of fear on his face at the thought of this battle within his heart. He asked, "Grandfather, which wolf wins the battle?" The grandfather said, "The wolf that you feed will win. The one that you feed will grow stronger and the one that you starve will eventually lose his power and will to fight."

The spiritual battle of good vs. evil is real. The battlefield is every human heart. It is up to each one of us to feed the white wolf within us and to starve the black wolf. The power of goodness that lies within each human heart is the Spirit of the Risen Lord. The Eternal Word is the giver and sustainer of life, the ground of our being. When we open our hearts to the gift of divine life that lies deep within us our hearts will be flooded with grace beyond measure. When that happens, the dark wolf will be overpowered.

The good news is that the victory has already been won. The only power that the black wolf has is the power that we allow him. He only has life in us if we feed him. The choice is ours. We call it freewill. And so, we pray, come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of us Your faithful and enkindle in us the fire of Your love. Amen.

Yours in Christ,



Personal Witness

At the beginning of my freshman year of high school, I read William Golding's 1954 novel *Lord of the Flies*. It was a required part of the curriculum. I don't recall if it was a part of our English or Religion class, but we read it as a group and spent a great deal of time discussing the book. It certainly offered a grim view of humanity. In the novel, a group of young British school boys are stranded on a deserted island after surviving a plane crash. Things started out well as they came together united in their distress. What started out well did not last. Disagreements led to the group splintering into factions that became contentious and quickly led to violence and even murder.

I recall thinking that the story was completely plausible. I had no inclination to doubt the negative view of human nature. My father and seven of my uncles had served in the Second World War. I was aware of the horrors and atrocities that the world had just endured. In addition, the war in Vietnam was raging. Man's inhumanity to man is a reality that has been a part of life on this planet since Cain killed his brother Abel.

After the fall of the Iron Curtain there seemed to be a breath of peace entering our world. Then random acts of terrorism and an epidemic of mass shootings began to emerge. The senseless slaughter of innocent people, many precious children in the sanctuary of their classrooms began to emerge as the new manifestation of evil.

Unknown to me, as I was reading the *Lord of the Flies* in September of 1966 a real-life Lord of the Flies situation was unfolding. That very month a fisherman discovered 6 school-boys who had been stranded on a deserted island for 15 months. They were marooned on the island of Ata. Interestingly, it was an island that was once inhabited but had been deserted since 1860 when the entire population was kidnapped by slave traders. The boys were a group of Catholic School children 13-15 years old who decided to play hooky from school one day and "borrowed" a boat from the local harbor. They were from Nuku'alofa, the capital of Tonga. A large storm at sea destroyed their sail and they lost their rudder and floated aimlessly for days before drifting aground on the island.

The boys suffered many hardships over the 15 months of seclusion. They had brought with them only a day's ration of food and no provisions. They found an old knife blade that was the only tool that they had. The boys formed a communal bond and a daily routine which included prayer and recreation. They developed a vegetable garden from native resources and hallowed out tree trunks to store rainwater as there was no freshwater source on the island. The six boys formed a lifelong bond from the comradery of their common struggle for survival. It is a much different story than the fictitious novel that has been read by millions.

In conclusion, the seeds of good and evil exist in every human heart. This tension within provides for a "level playing field" from which we make decisions every day of our lives. God allows human freedom at all cost. It was not God who flew those planes into the World Trade Center on 9/11. It was men who abused and misused their God given freedom to kill and destroy the innocent. To see the true cost of human freedom gaze upon the Cross of Jesus. Jesus paid the price once for all. The rest is up to each one of us. We live in a world darkened by sin. It is easy to become lost in the shadows, to flow with the current of society. The questions we must ask ourselves are twofold: one, where are the societal currents leading us, and two, are we the shining light in this darkened world that Jesus is asking us to be?

Fr Glenn