

5th Wednesday of Ordinary Time. 2/10/2021

What comes out of the man, that is what defiles him

Today we hear the words of Jesus responding to an argument on what makes a person either clean or unclean.

The people of Israel had dietary regulations that classified some foods as unclean and therefore not to be eaten, even though they were common for the people around them. These rules of ritual purity had a role to play in the history of Israel, a people set apart to receive and to keep the promises of God. As those promises are fulfilled in Jesus, a new covenant will be established, extending to all the nations of the earth.

The words of Jesus clarify for us how we need to think about clean and unclean, about purity and impurity. He

refers back to the ten commandments, especially those relating to our behavior with others. Those actions that disrupt our relationships, that destroy the life of the community, those are the things that we are to avoid.

And he tells us that those behaviors don't just appear in a vacuum, but they are tied to what is in our heart. They come from the heart.

Of course, he does not mean the organ that pumps blood in our veins. We understand the heart here as the center of our rational soul, not only where our feelings, pleasant or unpleasant, come and go, but as the site of our thoughts, our imagination, our desires and our decisions.

The desert Fathers thought deeply about the heart, as this inner place where thoughts are born and nurtured,

where temptations arise and are battled, where decisions are made. They talked about guarding our hearts, by not allowing thoughts of pride, envy, unchastity or resentment to take root. Not to even toy with unloving thoughts when they come up, because they grow, and they become words and actions that hurt ourselves and others.

It is also in our heart that virtue and love are planted.

From the heart can come good thoughts, patience, integrity, generosity, forgiveness, strength, acts of service and charity.

To be clean it is very important to watch what we do and how we behave, but even before that, we need to watch with what we fill our hearts. What are the thoughts and desires we harbor?

In our hearts we withdraw to be close to Christ in prayer.

We ask him to help us keep our hearts clean for him, to

sustain us in times of trial, to make us his witnesses and

channels of his love in the world.