

2021 August 29

Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading:

First: Deuteronomy 4.1-2, 6-8, "What other great nation has statutes and ordinances as just as this?" (8)

The Psalm: 15, "Lord, who may abide in your tent?" (1)

Second: James 1.17-22, 27, "Be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves." (22)

The Gospel: Mark 7.1-8, 14-15, 21-23, "It is from within, from human heart, that evil intentions come." (21a)

Listeners and doers of the Word

St. James exhorts us today to be doers of the Word and not mere hearers. Moses instructs the Israelites to obey all the commandments, neither adding to nor taking away anything from them. Jesus is annoyed by the mere lip service of the people. It is because their leaders teach human precepts and traditions as doctrines and abandon the precepts of God. All the three readings point to the importance of God's Word and the necessity of listening to and doing them. God does not prescribe anything unreasonable. His precepts and commandments are not without content and a reason.

Washing of hands and body and of cups and plates are not God's commandments. They are human precepts and they help safeguard our health and external purification. Internal purity is most important, which alone makes humans good or bad, obedient or disobedient. The sure means to internal purity are listening, understanding, and interiorizing the Word of God. Such interiority will make humans pure, truthful, and obedient to God.

Jesus begins today with a call to 'listen'. Listening is most important in the process of building up our relationship with God, with Jesus and with our fellow beings. Very often in our conversations we do not necessarily listen; we do not want to listen, sometimes we do not like the person who speaks or approaches us. Some of us happen to be of 'one-track' mind, that is, we are obsessed with what we are, what we have in mind, what we believe, what we think, and what we say, so much so that we never open our minds to listen. Our ears may hear but our minds may be closed, and so we do not listen and interiorize. Sometimes we listen only to people of our choice and close our minds to others. For not listening we may find excuses like the bad accent or imperfect language of the speaker. We ignore the fact that listening is also possible through ears, eyes, and heart and by being pro-actively involved with the speaker.

This is very true about the word of God proclaimed from our pulpits. Some of us have a mindset and are addicted to reading rather than listening when the proclamation is made. Here we truly fail to listen. The Word of God is meant to be spoken to and listened to. The Word and the grace that follows come to us by listening. If we are truly committed to follow the word, as our preparation for the day's liturgy, we must think about reading the passage in advance and come prepared to listen so that our minds are enlightened and absorbed in, and we interiorize what is spoken to us, by the word of mouth. This listening must be followed by personal reflection and action. The word that is spoken, if properly listened to, will challenge, provoke, prompt, chastise, and even detain us from proceeding with some of our preplanned courses of action. All these are the work of the Spirit.

Fr. George