

Twenty Second Sunday in Ordinary Time August 29, 2021

Our Lady of Perpetual Help

First Reading: Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-8

¹“And now, O Israel, give heed to the statutes and the ordinances which I teach you, and do them; that you may live, and go in and take possession of the land which the LORD, the God of your fathers, gives you. ²You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it; that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you. ... ⁶Keep them and do them; for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’ ⁷For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? ⁸And what great nation is there, that has statutes and ordinances so righteous as all this law which I set before you this day?”

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

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

Second Reading: James 1:17-18, 21-22, 27

¹⁷Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. ¹⁸Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures. ...

²¹Therefore put away all filthiness and rank growth of wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. ²²But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. ...

²⁷Religion that is pure and undefiled before God

and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

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

¹Now when the Pharisees gathered together to him, with some of the scribes, who had come from Jerusalem,

²they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands defiled, that is, unwashed. ³(For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they wash their hands, observing the tradition of the elders; ⁴and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they purify themselves; and there are many other traditions which they observe, the washing of cups and pots and vessels of bronze.) ⁵And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, “Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with hands defiled?”

⁶And he said to them, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; ⁷in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.’ ⁸You leave the commandment of God, and hold fast the tradition of men.” ...

¹⁴And he called the people to him again, and said to them, “Hear me, all of you, and understand: ¹⁵there is nothing outside a man which by going into him can defile him; but the things which come out of a man are what defile him.” ... ²¹For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, ²²coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.

Twenty Second Sunday in Ordinary Time August 29, 2021
Our Lady of Perpetual Help

INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God...

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

Watching her mother struggle, a single girl asked why it was necessary to cut the bone off the piece of meat before putting it in the pot to roast. The mother replied, "That's the way my mother did it." Later the girl asked her grandmother the same question, only to be given the same answer, "That's the way my mother did it." Somewhat intrigued to know the real reason, she placed a long-distance call to her great-grandmother asking the same question. This time she got a different answer, "Because it was too big for the pot I had." We chuckle at how this practical solution inadvertently became established as a meaningless tradition from one generation to the next.

The following statement succinctly captures Jesus' teaching in this week's Gospel reading by explaining, "Tradition is the living faith of the dead. Traditionalism is the dead faith of the living."¹ Jesus' teachings in this week's Gospel passage are about the dangers of traditionalism. He rebukes the Pharisees, not for the proper adherence to tradition, but for their traditionalism. As Catholics our lives and worship are marked by tradition, and unfortunately for some it has become traditionalism. Tradition is and should be a good and healthy aspect of our lives, leading us to Jesus and amplifying his teaching. The value of tradition is emphasized by Jesus' example as he observed the religious traditions of Judaism. The last supper Jesus had with his disciples took place amidst his observing of the Passover tradition. It was during this observance that Jesus instituted the sacrament and tradition of the Eucharistic meal. So, we know from his life that Jesus was not opposed to valuable traditions, but rather to the hypocrisy of traditionalism.

The point of Jesus' rebuke was the Pharisees' hypocritical concern about minute, man-made details of religious observances, while simultaneously harboring hearts overflowing with deceit and sin. Sacred Scripture tells us that God does not look on the outward appearances, but rather looks on the heart. So, God is not fooled by outward shows of religiosity, though people sometimes are.

Romano Guardini, in his book *The Lord*, discusses the dangers of traditionalism by explaining, "A special caste, that of the scribes, the protectors of the Law, grew up around it. They probed its meaning, interpreted, and applied it. They surrounded every paragraph with explanations and observations, which in turn gradually assumed the character of new laws, so that in the course of time a fine strong net held the whole of life in its meshes.

"... To this was added that which Jesus mentions with such heaviness of heart; hypocrisy and can't. On the outside, greatest delicacy of conscience; on the inside, hardness of heart. Outer loyalty to the Law; inner sin—and sin without admission of sin, with neither contrition nor the desire for salvation (Matt. 15:7; 22:19; 23:13-35). Such then the attitude with which Jesus was confronted." ²

Legitimate traditions, which are primarily manifest through outward expressions, are not to be abandoned, but rather to be understood as a means of transforming our heart and life. Tradition when practiced wisely, and wholeheartedly helps us examine and prepare our heart, reflect on the condition of our heart, and can lead our heart to Jesus and his teachings. Tradition should be a means of growth and grace and not simply used to validate a life with God which either does not exist or which exists in a sorry state of disrepair. To avoid traditionalism, we need not know where every tradition originated but like the young girl in the illustration, we must seek to know why we practice a tradition, and then practice it from the heart.

Twenty Second Sunday in Ordinary Time August 29, 2021
Our Lady of Perpetual Help

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

First Reading

1. How should traditional religious observances impact others?

Second Reading

2. What are the true marks of godly religion?
3. What does the phrase “receive with meekness the implanted word” mean to you?

Gospel Reading

4. How would you define hypocrisy?
5. What kind of non-religious family traditions does your family observe?
6. What religious traditions do you observe that you would like to understand more fully?
7. Give an example of how a tradition, when observed correctly, could positively impact a person’s heart.

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another’s openness and sensitivity. Conclude with a final prayer.