

Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, Feb 7th 2018

In today's Gospel reading, we hear Jesus overturning some commonly held understandings and traditions. His disciples even questioned him to make sure they understood his words correctly. Jesus reiterates that all food is clean and "nothing that enters one from outside can defile that person."

Perhaps one way to approach this reading might be to examine a change in our own understanding. Is there something in our lives that resonate with this Gospel passage? Perhaps we have had an experience lately where we discover that something that we have known to be true, wise and/or common practice is surprisingly turned upside down and proven false or irrelevant? It takes effort and energy (and grace) to handle with change well, but handling change can be even more difficult when it goes against a long standing tradition or hits us suddenly. Sometimes, we can even begin to question what is true among our other commonly held beliefs and practices, too.

Jesus does teach us that "from within the man, from his heart, come evil thoughts, unchastity, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, folly. All these evils come from within and they defile." He seems to be warning us and highlighting the slippery slope of evil that can come from our heart being in the wrong place.

Another way I invite us to think about applying this passage to our lives stems from a lesson that I am learning in my personal life. Sometimes I feel like I fall into a subtle but unhealthy trap of focusing so heavily on having my young children eating healthy and organic food, avoiding too much screen time, getting a good night's sleep, washing hands to prevent the spread of germs, etc. All of these things sometimes lead me to the focus of being overly concerned about what is entering the bodies of my young family members. These are all good and important things with which to be concerned. And yet, this reading reminds me that Jesus is calling me to be a parent that helps keep my children healthy by nurturing their healthy hearts, overflowing with love, openness, compassion for God, God's creation and God's people. Maybe, I could direct more of my energy to what is inside their hearts rather than what might be entering their bodies.

Perhaps we can take the attitude of the queen of Sheba, who is generous in spirit and material gifts when she visits King Solomon in the first reading from Kings.

Perhaps we are called to heed the words of wisdom from Psalm 37 to "commit to the Lord...trust in him...utter what is right...take refuge in [the Lord]."

What is God inviting us to consider in our own lives, today, in regard to Jesus' message about clean foods and the evils that can come from our own hearts.

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