

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Feb 9th 2021

The law of purity is usually considered one of the most socially pervading of the Jewish laws because it affects people of every social class. Questioning this law is like coming against the most fundamental of the laws that Jews of Jesus' time knew. However, in questions of truth, there is really no issue about what the masses think or accept. Jesus was questioning the observance of the law because he sought people's attention to the fundamental issues that the law was supposed to cater for. Laws are meant to foster human freedom and liberation. This is the reason the justice system of every society considers even the most vulnerable person as a subject of its juridical protection. However, when observance of laws become an instrument of enslavement or become heavy burdens, then they must be questioned. Washing of hands before eating is not only opportune but also hygienic for everyone. The law that Jesus questions however, looks at this washing as an avenue of ritual purification.

The Jews go to markets and could have touched anything ranging from defiled animals to menstruating women and their hands needed to be purified before ingesting food. However, Jesus and his disciples were itinerants who in a good number of occasions, we could imagine, are not in a position to find enough water for this purification. Charging them with not washing of hands is not only unrealistic but malicious. This law therefore became a way in which the freedom of this itinerant group was being curtailed. This was definitely not the spirit of that law. The answers of Jesus challenge us to give a heartfelt worship to God where we seek the good of people instead of their downfall.

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