

The Kingdom Within

Daily Gospel / Liturgical Cycle A

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Mark 7:14-23

He summoned the crowd again and said to them, "Hear me, all of you, and understand. Nothing that enters one from outside can defile that person; but the things that come out from within are what defile." When he got home away from the crowd his disciples questioned him about the parable. He said to them, "Are even you likewise without understanding? Do you not realize that everything that goes into a person from outside cannot defile, since it enters not the heart but the stomach and passes out into the latrine?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.) "But what comes out of a person, that is what defiles. From within people, from their hearts, come evil thoughts, unchastity, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, folly. All these evils come from within and they defile."

Introductory Prayer: Lord, I believe that you are my Creator and Redeemer and that you know all things. Though none of my sins are hidden from you, I know that you still love me unconditionally and are waiting for me to repent and turn to you so that you can forgive me and wash me clean once more. Thank you for loving me infinitely. I offer you my weak love in return.

Petition: Lord, help me to overcome my fallen nature and to put you first in my life.

1. "Nothing that goes into a man from the outside can make him unclean." "The Kingdom of God," as Christ tells us in the Gospel, "is within you." Consequently, all that wars against the Kingdom is also within us. Number 405 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us that original sin is a "deprivation of original holiness and justice." It states that human nature has been "wounded in the natural powers proper to it," and that it is subject to "ignorance, suffering and the dominion of death; and inclined to sin – an inclination to evil that is called 'concupiscence.'" This concupiscence causes all sorts of disordered tendencies to surface from within us. These disordered tendencies—if accepted—are, as our Lord tells us, what defiles a man. Our holiness and purification must start from within (in ordering our thoughts and desires according to the Gospel standard), and rise to the surface in concrete deeds of goodness (in words and actions). Where does concupiscence do the most damage in my life?

2. "It is the things that come out of a man that make him unclean." Sin and death entered the world through the disobedience of the Adam. But, "if death came to reign through that one, how much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of justification come to reign in life through the one person Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:15). It is true that death and sin strive to reign in us due to our concupiscence, but it is not less true that we have at our disposal all the means necessary to root sin out from our hearts and live a new life in Christ. Christ has already conquered sin and death. With his grace we can conquer them within our hearts. Without ever looking back we must start out on this path without ever looking back, the path of the reign of Christ within us. Am I sincerely striving to overcome concupiscence in my life?

3. "If anyone has ears to hear, let him listen to this." "If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts." This is a familiar theme in the Liturgy due to the fact that throughout the centuries, people have often closed their hearts to the message of the Gospel and to their own greatest good. In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), the rich man petitions Abraham to send Lazarus from the dead so that he can warn his brothers about the fate that awaits them due to their materialistic, self-centered way of life. The rich man is told that they have the Law and the Prophets, to which he replies that if only someone would return from the dead, the brothers would believe. He is told that even then people would not believe. I cannot permit my heart to be hardened against God's saving Word! But to remain open, my heart needs to be detached from the pleasures and easy way of living that makes me deaf to Christ's gentle instructions.

Conversation with Christ: Lord, open my ears and lift the veil from my eyes so that I will allow your Kingdom to reign in my heart. Free me from loving anything more than you. Free me to allow you to make demands in my life, demands which are proof of your love. Help me, Lord, to live Christian charity so that I will not be caught off guard on the Day of Judgment.

Resolution: I will foster goodness in my thoughts and desires, and I will deny entrance to anything that would drive Jesus away.