

## **Homily For Tuesday of the 18th Week of Ordinary Time- Year II**

### **St Peter's 8:30am Mass- August 7, 2018**

**St. Jean-Marie Vianney**

**Jer. 30:1-2,12-22** "Your hurt is incurable. There is no medicine for your wound, because of your sins."

**Psalms 102:15-22** "He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and will not despise their prayer."

**Matthew 15:1-2,10-14** "It is not what goes into the mouth but what comes from the heart that defiles."

### **From the Heart**

#### **Introduction**

There would be no point in Jesus applying for the job of Chief Medical Officer today. They would ask him about his thoughts on hand washing and he might say that it is highly overrated. It would be the end of that interview. He would be in direct conflict with one of the prime directives of our health and government leaders.

As always with Jesus, things are not what they seem on the surface. Is Jesus against hand washing in principal? As you might guess, that is NOT what is going on in today's Good News.

Right now, the biggest focus is on wearing masks but, for four months now, we have also had an endless series of admonitions to wash our hands thoroughly. We would be able to have a very pleasant and agreeable conversation with any Pharisee. We even use the same language, that of 'purifying' ourselves. That is the language of ritual in any religious tradition.

My mother enforced hand washing almost as strictly as she enforced going to church. She was a nurse trained in its importance. When it became official policy of governments, my siblings noted to each other that we had been preparing for this time all of our lives.

Today, the practice of our faith is being restricted in favour of the physical rituals. But that same faith commands us to look at the deeper meaning of what is going on, and not to let the 'visible' distract us from the essential.

Our saintly guide in appreciating Jesus on this day is St. John Vianney. He was preparing for the priesthood at the time of the French Revolution, when all religious ritual, and the priesthood itself, was under attack. The political circumstances are not the same but the effect is the same. St. John, the cure of the City of Ars, is said to have heard confessions up to 12 hours a day, as the people responded to him and the need for reconciliation, for conversion of their hearts.

### **Matthew**

The Pharisees want to know why Jesus would encourage his disciples not to wash their hands before eating. His reply flips their issue upside down: It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles. This is confusing to both the Pharisees and the disciples. Jesus needs to explain it, but not the Pharisees who challenge him. They won't get it because they are blind to the heart of the law.

The practice of hand washing was not a requirement of the Torah but a non biblical extension the mandate that priests must wash themselves before serving in the sanctuary. The Pharisees applied this priestly standard of purity to all Israel, requiring even laypeople to cleanse their hands before taking a meal.

Jesus points out that it is what comes out that bitterness, anger and jealousy come from the heart. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. But mercy and kindness are what make us pure. Washing hands and other rituals only fulfil their true meaning if they help us to see that our hearts need to be pure.

### **Jeremiah**

The people of Israel in Jeremiah's time are hopelessly lost in their sins. What language God uses: A grievous wound, an incurable pain. Their guilt is so great, there is no medicine, no cure. They are, spiritually, lost in their sin. But God reaches down and says: "I will restore your life... you shall be my people and I will be your God."

## **Call To Action**

St. John Vianney is the guide for our hearts today. The good saint reminds us of Jesus himself when he says: Our thoughts ought to be directed to where our treasure is, that is, our hearts. He says our hearts are small, but prayer stretches them and makes them capable of loving God. When one has a heart that is pure and united with God, he is given a kind of serenity and sweetness that makes him ecstatic, a light that surrounds him with marvelous brightness.

Our priests wash their hands ritually before offering the sacrifice at the altar. We do not. They do this on our behalf, so we do not need to carry out the physical action. Remember how Jesus washed the feet of the Apostles. When Peter objected, Jesus explained that this was not for cleanliness. It was a symbol of service and of self giving love, requiring humility which, of course, is a quality of the heart.

When we observe this ritual today, let us renew the cleansing of our hearts. Let us be people of mercy, love and kindness.