

Homily For Tuesday of the 28th Week of Ordinary Time- Year II

St Peter's 8:30am Mass - Oct. 13, 2020

Gal.5:1-6 "Christ has set us *free* (from the law). The only thing that counts is faith working through *love*."

Psalm 119:41-48 "I shall walk at *liberty*. I find my delight in your commandments, because I *love* them."

Luke 11:37-41"You clean the outside of the cup but inside is wickedness. Give alms and all will be clean."

A Clean Heart

Introduction

NHL playoff hockey just finished. Professional hockey players have always had the reputation of being the most superstitious of athletes. Pregame rituals are often followed meticulously. I remember when hockey players started the trend of not shaving as long as they were still winning. Now you see the huge beards of many, that don't get shaved off until the playoffs are over. I don't think a beard can make someone play better, but they can be part of a belief system that certain rituals will make a difference to the result. Most of the time, we would probably see such practices as harmless.

In today's readings, we see both Jesus and St. Paul severely condemning behaviours that have become empty gestures and have lost any power they would have had, or should have had, to bring someone into a right relationship with God. In fact, they have become a barrier to salvation itself.

Foundation in God's Law

Beginning with the psalm, and throughout Sacred Scripture, we have lots of evidence for the foundational importance of obedience to God's laws and decrees. What is at the heart of such obedience?

My hope is in your ordinances: Just as for the psalmist, our Christian hope always rests on trusting God, and looking to God for how to live our lives.

Your decrees are my delight: It is a joy, not a burden, to align ourselves with the Lord who has only our happiness in mind.

I shall walk at liberty, for I have sought your precepts: To seek the ways of the Lord is to be free, not enslaved by useless and empty rituals. It isn't the precepts themselves so much as the seeking to align with God that sets us free.

Happy are those who keep his decrees, who seek him with their whole heart: Verse two of this long psalm, chock full of these sentiments, says that the key is the orientation of the heart.

Hope, delight, liberty and happiness must be sought with the whole heart to have any meaning at all.

Jesus On Clean Hands/Clean Heart

The religious zeal of the Pharisees focused on the exterior of the body and often failed to penetrate to the heart. Hygiene is not the issue here. They are accusing him of not caring about the religious purity rituals of the oral law. This was a body of rituals was designed to supplement God's written Law and intensify its requirements of ritual purity. The intention was good, but the Pharisees elevated it to an equal level with God's commandments and so they lost the heart of the matter.

Jesus returns the accusation: You Pharisees are focused on external cleansing but you should be focused on what is most important, the inside, where you are filled with evil. But he does not leave them there. He provides a method for cleansing the heart. The instrument is almsgiving - works of mercy. They had lost this. The point of the law was always to bring people into the realm of the merciful and infinite mercy of the one who made us for love. God sees the inside of the cup.

St. Paul On Circumcision

Those promoting circumcision to the Church at Galatia were saying you need Christ, but that's not enough. You also need the whole law, including circumcision. Circumcision was the outward sign of participation in the covenant relationship with God. But it was always meant to have an inward dimension, centered in the heart. For us, Baptism is that sign, which now has the power to actually bring about the cleansing that it symbolizes. But it still has to be lived out

in obedience to Christ, whose desire is our freedom from slavery to sin. This type of obedience leads to freedom.

Observance of the law, including circumcision, places the onus for achieving salvation on human capacity for obedience. You have to fulfil the law perfectly or you have failed. That is why it is slavery. One can never measure up but has to spend every moment of his life trying. Until Christ, the law was necessary because it pointed forward to the perfect obedience of Christ. He was obedient to the meaning of the law, which is love.

The new law, Paul tells the Galatians, is lived out as "faith working through love." The Catholic position is that faith alone is insufficient to justify the sinner. It must be joined with love in acts of generosity and service. Otherwise, it is empty and vain.

Some Catholics seek Baptism almost as a superstitious ritual. I had better get my kids 'done' just in case it helps. But Christ suffered and died for that ritual. For Paul, the Gospel is all about the crucifixion, not circumcision. It is about the Spirit, not the law.

At mass, our priests still do a ritual hand washing. I watch our priests. Especially today, they all come to the altar with clean hands. The hand wash at mass is a ritual sign, asking for a clean heart. Today is the 103rd anniversary of the miracle of the sun at Fatima, which calls for the world to repent and turn back to God. Jesus said to Peter when he washed his feet: You are already clean. This is a sign of the service of love you must provide to others.

Call To Action

We know that hand washing is one of the two most significant ways we prevent the spread of physical illness, so for us it is a purely hygienic activity. But we might use each time we wash or sanitize as an opportunity to say a short prayer: Lord, grant that I have a clean heart and a desire to love you and serve those whom you have called me to love. If we could remember it, today's Collect would be worth praying: It is full and lasting happiness to serve with constancy the author of all that is good.

Key Scripture Passages

Collect: *It is full and lasting happiness to serve with constancy the author of all that is good.*

Galatians: *Christ has set us free. Do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. If you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no benefit to you. Every man who lets himself be circumcised is obliged to obey the entire law. You who want to be justified by the law have cut yourselves off from Christ. You have fallen away from grace. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything. The only thing that counts is faith working through love.*

Psalms: *My hope is in your ordinances. I will keep your law continually, forever and ever. I shall walk at liberty, for I have sought your precepts. I find my delight in your commandments, because I love them.*

Luke: *A Pharisee invited Jesus to dine with him but was amazed that Jesus did not first wash before dinner. The Lord said: You Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You fools! Give for alms those things that are within, and see, everything will be clean for you.*