

The Evil Within

Today, as we resume the reading of Mark's Gospel, we meet a controversy over ritual cleanness (cf. Mark 7:1-23). The Pharisees and scribes questioned him as to why his disciples didn't follow the traditional hand-washing rituals before eating. These traditions were deeply rooted in Jewish law and were seen as essential for maintaining spiritual purity. So, Jesus addresses the issue of ceremonial cleanness and the true source of defilement. He responds by highlighting their hypocrisy; they prioritize human traditions over God's commandments. They are more concerned about outer cleanness than cleanness of heart. He quotes Isaiah (cf. Isaiah 29:13), emphasizing that their worship is in vain because their hearts are far from God.

In general, the Pharisees saw evil as something outside of themselves – in things and especially in other people. They prided themselves on being virtuous and despised everyone else. The mentality was that if evil was outside themselves, then they could protect themselves from it by avoiding contact with people, or where this was not possible then by ritual washings. They were sincere people, but it is just that their efforts were directed at the wrong target. They emphasized outer cleanness, but neglected inner cleanness or cleanness of heart.

Jesus states that nothing that enters a person from outside can defile the person, but that, evil comes from within. He lists various sins, including evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, and deceit, asserting that these originate from the human heart. This shifts the focus from external actions to internal motivations, suggesting that true defilement is a matter of the heart rather than mere adherence to ritualistic practices.

This teaching of Jesus has significant implications for believers. It serves as a reminder that spiritual purity is not achieved merely by external observances but through a transformed heart. Evil is not something outside of ourselves. The source of evil is within us. It has its roots in the heart. All the sins listed by Jesus start inside a person. Their seeds are within us. The emphasis on the heart's condition challenges individuals to reflect on their inner thoughts and intentions, recognizing that everyone has the capacity for evil.

The problem of our time, is the failure to know ourselves, to recognize evil and deal with it within ourselves. There is a huge preoccupation with cleanness of body. Hence, all the ads about soaps, perfumes, etc. And there is great preoccupation with the environment – with the quality of water we drink, the food we eat, and the air we breathe. All of these are important, but there is another environment which is even more important – the moral environment. Evil is the

worst pollution of all, and it affects, not only the moral, but the physical environment as well. Therefore, it is essential for believers to seek inner transformation rather than merely conforming to external religious practices.