

Twenty-Second Sunday Ordinary Time– Year B

September 2, 2018

Christ the Good Shepherd, ORCC

Reflection by Father Charles Blanchard

First Reading: Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-8

Psalm: 15:2-3, 3-4, 4-5(1a)

Second Reading: James 1:17-18, 21b-22, 27

Gospel: Mark 7:1-8; 14-15, 21-23

Welcome to Christ the Good Shepherd. It's exciting to see so many people of divergent backgrounds who have decided to come here; to pray; to sing; and to affirm common ground. A common ground created out of Catholic ritual, tradition and history, and yet applied, in a new and creative way where all are welcome to hear God's Word and feast at this table where there is no partiality.

Is there anyone who can teach, guide and direct us as Jesus does? Is there any faith tradition that as strong and true as our own? There is no God other than ours, Father, Son and Spirit, that claims to give us the truth about what it means to be human, what it means to believe and what it means to live with complete faith in God.

The first reading today is from the Book of Deuteronomy and speaks about how our ancestors had an enormous pride in their faith but also a deep awareness that it was truly God who was leading them and showing them how to believe. They believed deeply that God was speaking to them in history, in His chosen people, in those who were chosen to lead them and in everything. It was this belief that sustained them and which still sustains the Jewish people. We, Christians who follow Jesus Christ, acknowledge the Jewish people as our ancestors in the faith. We can only understand Jesus if we understand our Jewish ancestors. This is why we always have readings from the Old Testament. Jesus Himself explains who He is to those who accompanied Him to Emmaus after the Resurrection by explaining the Scriptures to them. The only Scriptures at that point would have been the Jewish Scriptures, what we call the Old Testament.

The second reading today is from the Letter of James. We are told to be doers of the Word and not only hearers. This is echoed so much today: we need actions and not just words. All of us should recognize that if we only speak about God or about Jesus or about the Spirit—and our lives have no actions showing that our beliefs have taken effect—then no one will believe our words. This is echoed strongly today in the movement to combat sexual abuse and the cover-ups of sexual abuse by bishops and religious leaders. We humans get tired of words that do not change our lives into action. This is why today's short excerpt from the Letter of James ends this way: "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained by the world." Actions must come from beliefs.

The Gospel today is from Saint Mark and tells us about the complaint of the Pharisees and some scribes that the followers of Jesus were not observing the proper Jewish laws when they did not wash their hands before eating. Jesus shows Himself to be impatient with this understanding of faith: "You disregard God's commandment but cling to human tradition." What use is it to wash our hands if we don't love other people and only use religious traditions to make life difficult for others?

Jesus is so clear in His teachings. He tells us that He did not come to destroy the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfill them. Jesus has no problem with the person who washes His hands and still serves the poor and the needy. The problem is with us who make sure to wash our hands but never pay attention to the poor and the needy in our midst! If I go to Church regularly but don't care about the poor and the needy, my Church-going is in vain. I should both be going to Church and serving the poor and the needy.

We can never use our faith to think that we are just fine and ignore the poor and the needy. We must seek how to serve others. God calls us in Christ Jesus to serve all others and to sacrifice ourselves and our own desires in the serving of others.