

## Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B Readings and Commentary

Celebrations Summary By Glenn CJ Byer, MA SLD: What is the purpose of the law? More importantly, why should we observe the law? Is it so that we don't go to jail or get a speeding ticket? That would not be the answer of Jesus, or the answer from the book of Deuteronomy or the Psalm of today's liturgy. The law is a gift of God, and its purpose is to bring us fulfillment. The most serious consequence of breaking the law is not that we get caught and punished, but rather that we are moving away from the fullness of life and joy that God offers us.

That is why the spirit of the law is so important to Jesus and why he can say that even though the Pharisees follow all the prescriptions of the law, they may not in fact be seeing the spirit of the law and so are missing the offer of life that God is giving them. The external observance is to help train our souls. If we observe the law of God and embrace it with our hearts, then we are well on our way to being the complete person that Christ calls us to be.

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

#### **A reading from the Book of Deuteronomy**

Moses said to the people:

"Now, Israel, hear the statutes and decrees  
which I am teaching you to observe,  
that you may live, and may enter in and take possession  
of the land  
which the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you.  
In your observance of the commandments of the LORD, your  
God,  
which I enjoin upon you,

you shall not add to what I command you nor subtract from it.

Observe them carefully,

for thus will you give evidence

of your wisdom and intelligence to the nations,

who will hear of all these statutes and say,

'This great nation is truly a wise and intelligent people.'

For what great nation is there

that has gods so close to it as the LORD, our God, is to us whenever we call upon him?

Or what great nation has statutes and decrees

that are as just as this whole law

which I am setting before you today?"

The word of the Lord

Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-8 Commentary by Maribeth Howell,

OP: Today's first reading may come as a bit of surprise.

Chronologically, this story takes place long before last week's first reading from the book of Joshua. There, at the end of the book of Joshua, after the Israelites had taken possession of the land and divided it among the various tribes, Joshua presented the people with the choice to "decide today whom you will serve." After affirming that they would serve the Lord, there was a renewal of the covenant.

In today's reading from Deuteronomy, we are presented with an earlier scene from Israel's history, one that takes place prior to the crossing of the Jordan. In our text, not unlike many passages in Deuteronomy, we find Moses instructing the Israelites on how they are to live once they enter the Promised Land. Remember, Moses will not enter the land with them. Therefore, in this book, over and over again, Moses reminds the people of who they are, of where they have been and to what they are called. Repeatedly and with great precision, Moses details covenant obligations. One of the significant and fascinating qualities of

Deuteronomy is its ability to draw us into the picture. If we listen carefully, we will discover that the words of Moses are not only addressed to the Israelites, but they are addressed to each generation of listeners; they are addressed to us. Be attentive to the text. Listen to the frequency of the words "you," "we," "us" and "today." Attend to these words of instruction.

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

### **A reading from the Letter of Saint James**

Dearest brothers and sisters:

All good giving and every perfect gift is from above,  
coming down from the Father of lights,  
with whom there is no alteration or shadow caused by  
change.

He willed to give us birth by the word of truth  
that we may be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

Humbly welcome the word that has been planted in you  
and is able to save your souls.

Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deluding  
yourselves.

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.

### **The word of the Lord**

Commentary James 1:17-18, 21b-22, 27 By Fr. Damien  
Dougherty, O.F.M.: James establishes a principle: the  
Christian is such because of an intervention of the

transcendent goodness of God. Aware of this, disciples will have to live in practice all of the implications of Baptism that will promote an attitude that is fruitfully receptive to the Word of God because a listening that is merely superficial is not enough.

The person who accepts the Gospel, through the vision of faith, becomes a child of God through the life that God communicates within Baptism and that immerses him solidly in an ideal environment of sacredness; thus, the faithful can be, in respect to all the rest of creation, a firstfruit offered in worship to God.

The Christian, by being baptized, lays aside the entire, overabundant accumulation of his moral evilness. By keeping himself in a state of meekness, of openness towards others, he will then be able to receive the Word of God that comes in be planted within him, as it is the seed deposited within his heart and will then bear fruit.

Always attentive to the concrete, James know how much evil can be done to others through a careless word, and the Christian must know how to be vigilant, prudent in his way of speaking. Obviously, while not advocating a mutism that would destroy any form of spontaneity, his point is that a thoughtless and damaging manner of speaking would render one's religion vain because the worship that is always pleasing to God is an active love towards others.

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

**A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark**

When the Pharisees with some scribes who had come from Jerusalem  
gathered around Jesus,

they observed that some of his disciples ate their meals with unclean, that is, unwashed, hands.  
—For the Pharisees and, in fact, all Jews, do not eat without carefully washing their hands, keeping the tradition of the elders.  
And on coming from the marketplace they do not eat without purifying themselves.  
And there are many other things that they have traditionally observed,  
the purification of cups and jugs and kettles and beds.—  
So the Pharisees and scribes questioned him,  
"Why do your disciples not follow the tradition of the elders but instead eat a meal with unclean hands?"  
He responded,  
"Well did Isaiah prophesy about you hypocrites, as it is written:  
*This people honors me with their lips,  
but their hearts are far from me;  
in vain do they worship me,  
teaching as doctrines human precepts.*  
You disregard God's commandment but cling to human tradition."

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.

"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."

## **The Gospel of the Lord**

Commentary Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23 By John Paul Heil:  
Main Theme: Pure WORSHIP of God is WORSHIP from our  
HEARTS.

In this controversy story the hypocritical Pharisees and scribes who oppose Jesus serve as negative models for what it means to follow the true way and will of God in order to worship God authentically. Their hypocrisy warns us that our cherished religious traditions and customs, which are merely human precepts, can nullify the very word of God they are meant to supplement and support, if they serve our own selfish aims rather than God's plan. But by powerfully reaffirming God's word over human tradition, Jesus invites us to allow the original, genuine and clear word of God to purify the excesses that our various religious, social and cultural human traditions, customs and practices have introduced into our attempt to live authentic human lives through a genuine and sincere worship of God.

Through his new and authoritative teaching Jesus draws us away from a superfluous preoccupation with unessential external concerns in our worship of God, and calls us rather to cultivate a clean and open "heart" within our inner selves in order to facilitate a proper and wholesome relationship not only with God but with our fellow human beings. Jesus alerts us to our need to contend with and overcome the horribly wicked and destructive "defilement" of thoughts and actions that can emerge from the human heart, not only of others but of ourselves.

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