

ORDINARY SUNDAY XXII “B”
SEPTEMBER 1/2, 2018

If any of us have used the so-called “5 Second Rule” after dropping some food on the floor, hopefully there was no gospel Pharisee nearby!

The Pharisees who confronted Jesus about his disciples’ ritual purity were so concerned with strict observance of the law—some of which didn’t even come from God—that they lost sight of God’s desire for mercy, justice and love, the heart of the Law. More than anything else, such inverted priorities caused Jesus to respond abruptly and forcefully as he directed his disciples to look at the state of their hearts before they considered their actions or the actions of others.

The Church itself is not immune from “Phariseeism”. Archbishop Diarmuid Martin of Dublin, Ireland in his homily two weeks ago to a nation also rocked by the revelations of the crimes of physical and sexual abuse by priests and nuns and their subsequent cover up by church authorities stated: “The anger is not just about abuse but also about a Church that was authoritarian, harsh, autocratic and self-protecting. Rather than bringing the liberating message of the love of God, it imposed a world of rules to such an extent that it lacked respect for the personal life of many and especially of women. We experienced a Church that felt like it knew all the answers. We experienced a Church that failed to form mature consciences and help men and women grow in discerning a mature faith. Faith requires rules and norms but there are also occasions where empty rules alienate from Jesus himself.” Later he states: “We need a Church of light, a light that exposes darkness for what it is, and a light that is such that the mechanisms of cover-up and self-justification cannot extinguish or tone down.”

Pope Francis in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Gaudete et Exultate* (**Rejoice and Be Glad!**) issued this past spring calls all of us in the Church to live lives of authentic holiness as set before us by Jesus so as to be, as Archbishop Martin urges, “a church of light.” Doing so, the Pope warns against falling prey to the ancient heresy of Pelagianism. Pelagianism is a spirituality and life of faith in which trust in God is replaced by salvation through our own works; a life of faith all tied up with the correct carrying out of rituals and following laws instead of focused on

wholehearted love of God and love of neighbor, issues which the author of the letter of James will address us on over the next five weekends.

When we look at Jesus' description of the human heart and the sins that rise from it: evil thoughts, unchastity, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, licentiousness (a lifestyle free of any moral restraint), envy, blasphemy (abuse of the name and person of God, Mary, the saints, the sacraments of the Church, mockery of holiness in its legitimate expressions), arrogance (pride) folly—we might feel a sense of self-condemnation and despair. After all, who of us can look at such a list without seeing something to a greater or lesser degree of a reflection of our own inner state?

God in today's Scriptures calls us to examine our hearts not so that we would feel condemned or to "lay a guilt trip" on us (though genuine guilt is a healthy emotion which ideally should lead to repentance and conversion). God calls us today to examine our hearts so that we can know freedom and peace. Many saints have commented that the more deeply they saw their sin, the more fully they recognized God's offer of mercy and love; a recognition of their need for God, coupled with confidence in his power at work in them. In fact, they considered it a privilege to come to such self-knowledge, for it always led them to the Lord. The Trappist monk Thomas Merton and Venerable Dorothy Day, a co-founder of the Catholic Worker movement, are two models of holiness as proposed by Jesus from our own country's recent history whom Pope Francis held up as models in his speech to a joint session of Congress during his pastoral visit nearly three years ago.

Through his cross, Jesus has forgiven our sins. He shed his blood to cleanse our hearts. We don't have to be perfect to be accepted by God. We simply have to respond to him by repenting of our sins, loving him in return, and choosing with a willing heart to obey him. Jesus will take care of the rest. Looking into our hearts is not such a painful experience when we realize that in the midst of sin and darkness (our own and the Church's), Jesus is still there, wanting to shine his light more brightly.

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