

In today's Gospel, Jesus encounters Pharisees. Our tendency is to think of the Pharisees in a bad light, but we should understand that basically, their intent was good. They were a response to the hardships that the Jewish people had brought upon themselves. They believed that if they do everything and only what God desires of His people, they can avoid any further hardship. While their intention was good, as Jesus often contended, so often they were misguided in how they sought to guide the people according to what God desired for them.

In today's reading the Pharisees were scandalized by what they witnessed in Jesus' disciples, their violation of eating their meals properly. The issue is not so much one of hygiene but instead of ritual purity. To push back against their accusatory question, Jesus references the words of Isaiah: "*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.*" And to be clear, Jesus is not rejecting tradition categorically, but instead, traditions of the Pharisees that are either not based on God's word or even more those that counter God's word.

Then Jesus addressed the crowd of onlookers: "*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.*" And he elaborates by listing of twelve sins, some of which are sinful acts and others that are instead interior dispositions: "*From within people, from their hearts, come (their sins)...All these evils come from within and they defile.*"

Maybe we can look at these as we would an examination of conscience and consider which ones apply to us. Maybe there are some among us who are batting a thousand on all those. As we would likely agree, there are different types of sin, and some are more harmful than others, but varied as sin might be, they all come from one place: the human heart. St. Bede, an 8th century monk, said, "*Some believe that evil thoughts are inspired wholly by the devil and that the human will cannot be held responsible for them. It is true that the devil can inspire and encourage evil thoughts, but he is not their origin*" (St. Bede, In Marci Evangelium, 2,7,20-21). It's us, our hearts.

Even as we hear Jesus' words that, "*Nothing that enters one from outside can defile that person*", we would agree that our bodies are affected, for better or for worse, by what we put in them: food, nutrition supplements, chemicals, medications, etc. Likewise, our hearts are likewise affected by what goes in: how we feed our consciousness and form our moral understanding, the things we watch, the things we read, the things we listen to, and company we keep. And so, what eventually comes out from our hearts is largely affected by what we willfully expose them to and feed them with.

But I also want to add that what comes out from within us is also affected by wounds we may bear, whether on our bodies or in our hearts. Each of us has received wounds in our lifetime, sometimes self-inflicted and other times at the hands of another person, even if it was not their intention to do us harm. It may have been physical abuse, or it may have come from some form of rejection from someone important in your life. These experiences can lead to a distorted view of oneself and usually bear effect in woundedness. Over time, we can lose awareness of them. These forgotten and hidden wounds are triggered throughout our lives, and become manifest in our relationship struggles, our fears, our lingering shame, and so on.

Just as what goes up, comes down, so what goes into our hearts will come back out. Jesus makes it clear that he wants to be what goes into our hearts, so that ultimately, he can be what emerges from them. For the wounds that remain deep within our hearts, it will be in letting Jesus into those wounds, and even the painful memories of how they came to be, that we will begin to find something more akin to the beauty of Jesus that comes out of us.

It makes me think of the beautiful promise God made through the prophet Ezekiel (36:26-30): "*I will sprinkle clean water over you to make you clean; from all your impurities and from all your idols I will cleanse you. I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you...you will be my people, and I will be your God...I will summon the grain and make it plentiful...I will increase the fruit on your trees and the crops in your fields...*"

And I believe He would add: *I will take away the pain within your broken heart. I will restore the Sacred Heart I gave you when you were born, and from that, from out of you, will come life for others. Just give me space within you. Allow me to enter and live in your heart.*