

TRINITY 13/ORD 22
Deut 4:1-2;6-8
James 1:17-18; 21-22;27
Mk 7:1-8;14-15;21-23

The phrase, "Action speaks louder than words" summarises the theme of today's readings. The first reading is part of Moses' farewell speech to his people in which he tells them that the Ten Commandments are God's law describing the kind of community that God wanted his people to build. With this comes a warning not to twist these laws to suit themselves, but rather to adjust their lives to conform to them. This is the first lesson we too can learn from this reading. Don't revise what God has revealed.

Jesus accused the Pharisees of doing this by obscuring the true meaning of God's law through their Oral Tradition which was the teachings of the rabbis handed on to their students. While the oral Tradition was intended to clarify and protect God's written Law, it did the opposite.

The gospel reading describes the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees over clean and unclean food. Jesus attacks the Oral Tradition about ritual cleanness, but he also seems to question the food laws of the Torah, the written law. He says that impurity and uncleanness come from within a person, not from what goes into that person.

St Mark's gospel portrays Jesus through the lens of the prophet Isaiah. Jesus speaks for God and as on this occasion uses the very words of Isaiah. Saying the right words or performing the right rituals is no guarantee that a person is truly worshipping God or will act in the right way.

Jesus says that defilement and impurity is ethical, not ritual. This was a startling statement for him to make in the world in which he lived for it wasn't only Jews, but also Greeks and pagans who observed some form of food laws and practiced ritual purity. Yet Jesus did not replace the ritual rules of the Pharisees with ethical rules that would make us 'pure' before God. He just makes it clear that people are defiled by the evils that flow from poor choices and acting on impure thoughts.

St James' epistle urges his readers to listen to God, exercise self-control and make certain our brain clicks into gear before we open our mouth. James tells us that our conscience and hence lives must be formed through our relationship with God, and what we say and do must flow from that relationship.

In every Mass we are nourished through the Scriptures and strengthened by receiving Jesus' body and blood. But unless we respond positively to God's love, what is the point? Clocking up mass attendances and spending time in Adoration before the Blessed Sacrament means little unless we are spurred into contributing to the Churches mission and ministry. Being disconnected through the Mass or rattling through the Rosary or other devotions as if we are on a racetrack is not prayer. It is Praying, not merely saying our devotions draws us into a deeper relationship with God.

The liturgical wars that are raging through the Church at the moment concerning what mass is valid or whether we need priests because we can make our spiritual communion anywhere, is a demonic strategy designed to turn the Church against itself and stifle its Evangelistic and Pastoral mission. What matters is not so much whether our liturgical worship is beautiful and pure as we define that, but whether we are a community of deep faith through which God is able to draw others to himself.

Action does indeed speak louder than words.

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