



Praying the Scripture - a few simple steps at home

Sunday 29th August 2021

1. Start with stillness and quietening down; then gently read the passage, noticing any feelings and connections to your own experience.
2. Read the passage again and spend understand. *The notes in your Bible may be of help at this point.*
3. Read the passage a third time - wondering how you yourself might pray the text over the next few days.
4. Over the next week, set aside times to come back more than once to the passage. You could read it all or part of it again, slowly. Perhaps there is a special word for you in this passage of Scripture? Keep this word or phrase in your thoughts and gently repeat it, bringing it to mind and allowing God to speak to you in your heart.
5. Finally, come back to the text to conclude: What is God in this scripture asking of you this week? What is the one challenge, one little change you are asked to make or the thing you have been asked to do? Then say a prayer of thanksgiving for the good news in the passage. End in quiet prayer.



THIS SUNDAY'S GOSPEL – Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

This people honours me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me...

Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them. (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders; and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it; and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles.) So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, 'Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?' He said to them, 'Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written, "This people honours me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines."

You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition.'

Then he called the crowd again and said to them, 'Listen to me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile.' For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.'



A Short Thought

Today's Gospel is a difficult and hard hitting one but it highlights the struggle that every community in every age faces - including our own - how can the "*tradition of the elders*," which has given us our identity, now be changed so that what was good in it - the desire to live according to the will of God - can actually be lived and expressed in our current circumstances. Very often we live by tradition, which provides continuity with the past and creates a sense of community. Yet sometimes the living tradition can be replaced by fossilised traditions which end up distracting us from what is essential in our beliefs. This is what Jesus criticised in his fellow Jews: you think you are good people by observing all the traditions about external things without caring about their spirit. This deserved the harsh judgement of Isaiah, "*This people honours me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.*" Jesus proclaims a religion that is a religion of the heart. He is not interested in external things, for these cannot defile a person, but God is more concerned with who we are on the inside than the outward ceremonies we observe. You can pray standing up or you can pray sitting down and still never really pray. You can wash your hands a thousand times and still have sin in your heart. You can sing every song in the hymnal and still not know God. You can worship on red carpet all your life and never really experience holy ground. You can take crust and the cup before the sermon every time and still never commune with God. It's not the outward form of the tradition that matters; it's what lies in our hearts that counts.

Today may be a good day for us to ask ourselves: At times, do we judge or critique others because they are not following the law (as we understanding it), be that the law of God or the law of the land? I assume we do. Many of our judgments are automatic. They may be leftovers from what we were taught as a child – more genetic than chosen. Judgments simply are part of our human condition. And often we may not be fully aware that we are judging another person for breaking one of the laws or rules we consider to be important. Most all of us do not like it when another person judges us. Yet at times, we automatically judge others when we may not have the complete picture.

It is not our place to judge others. This is God's work to do. If/when you find yourself beginning to judge another today, stop, breathe, and pray. Then go on about your day. You may find your day is lighter and brighter without so much judgment!

SOME POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. For a moment put yourself in the position of the different characters in today's Gospel. Who do you identify with the most? Why?
2. In your life, are there any traditions which you consider sacred and others which you do not? Which ones? Why?
3. Think of a time you felt that your faith, what you believe was challenged? How did this make you feel? What was the outcome?
4. Even fidelity in religious practice is not enough. "This people honours me with their lips, but their heart is far from me". How have you experienced the importance of carrying your faith beyond attendance at Mass on Sundays? When have you seen that in others? What brought this home to you?
5. In the name of the tradition of the ancients, the Pharisees refused the Commandment of Jesus. Does this happen today? Where and when? Does it also happen in my life?
6. "It is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come." It is also from within that good intentions come. We have choices. When have you been faced with the choice between good and evil? When did you realise the importance of accepting responsibility for your own life and choices? How has this helped your growth as a person?
7. Are there places in your life, in your church where practice does not match belief? Bring these to Jesus in prayer. Be open to his response.

Prayer -

Father of light, giver of every good and perfect gift, bring to fruition the word of truth sown in our hearts by your Son, that we may rightly understand your commandments, live your law of love, and so offer you worship that is pure and undefiled. Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen

Prayer in these uncertain times

We pray for all those in our country and throughout the world suffering from the Corona Virus. May its victims and their families be strengthened by the support of our community of faith and restored soon to full health. We also pray for our leaders and medical personnel who deal with the virus. May we keep calm and may we join together in solidarity with care and compassion to tackle this emergency. This we ask in confidence through Christ Our Lord. Amen

