

Homily: 22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday: 2015: Cycle B: Dt. 4: 1-2, 6-8; Ps. 15; James 1: 17-18, 21-22, 27;  
Mk 7: 1-8, 14-15, 21-23

### **“Purification of the Heart”**

Are our hearts focused on God? Or are they divided? It is a real battle, as St. Paul says (see Romans chapter 7), that goes on in the heart of man, between the fallen nature we are born into and the redeemed nature that we receive in Baptism. **The lifelong spiritual challenge is to put on the nature of Christ more and more in all that we say, think, and do in our lives.** God and the Church remind us the grace is there to improve daily and win in the end, in Christ, if we are willing to engage in the battle for purity of heart.

1. Today we hear Jesus telling us that *“Nothing that enters from outside can defile a 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.”* Building on what Jesus said, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states, **“The heart is the seat of the moral personality of man”** (CCC 2517). In the Biblical understanding **the heart is the moral, spiritual and emotional center of the human person.** This is what we need to focus on if we want to draw closer to God. As human beings we often focus on what we see, but the real battle is behind or beneath the surface of things. **It is in the human heart where the real battleground between good and evil, between authenticity and hypocrisy, is constantly being waged.** Jesus wants to be the Lord of our hearts, but we have to invite Him in or we will end up being, what St. Paul says in the 7<sup>th</sup> chapter of the letter to the Romans, a person who **“has the desire to do the right, but not the power. What happens is that I do, not the good I will to do, but the evil I do not intend.”** (Rom 7:18-19). To cite a few examples: *you may want to be patient with a certain person, but then you give in to impatience; you want to be pure with your boyfriend or girlfriend, but then you slip up. You want to say a daily Rosary or read the Bible in the evening for a half an hour, but end up flipping through the t.v. channels for a couple of hours, and then are too tired to pray. You go on vacation and have every*

*intention of going to Sunday Mass, and then it doesn't happen! What is going on in this dynamic? Does this sound familiar? Can you relate to this? I know I can!*

2. **We need purity of heart!** The sixth beatitude of Jesus on the Sermon on the Mount is, *“Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God”* (Mt 5:8). What does that mean? Well, the Catechism tells us, *“Pure in heart refers to those who have attuned their intellects and wills to the demands of God’s holiness, chiefly in **three** areas: **charity** (cf. 1 Tim 4:3-9; 2 Tim 2:22), **chastity or sexual rectitude** (cf. 1 Thess 4:7; Col 3:5; Eph 4:19), and **love of truth and orthodoxy of faith** (cf. Titus 1:15; 1 Tim 1:3-4; 2 Tim 2: 23-26). **There is a deep connection between purity of heart, of body and of faith.** To paraphrase St. Augustine, the playboy to saint, who put it so well: *if we want to faithful we must believe the articles of the Creed, so that by believing we may obey God, by obeying we may live well, by living well we may purify our hearts, and with pure hearts we may understand what we believe (in CCC paragraph 2518).* Or as St. James puts it bluntly today in the 2<sup>nd</sup> reading, *“**Be doers of the word and not hearers only**, deluding yourself. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God is this: to care for orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained by the world.”**
  
3. **How do we gain the power to live our lives with pure hearts in relation to God and neighbor?** We must ask God daily for this grace. The Catechism states, *the “pure in heart” are promised that they will see God face to face and be like Him. Purity of heart is the precondition of the vision of God. Even now it enables us to see according to God, to accept others as “neighbors”; it lets us perceive the human body - ours and our neighbor’s- as a temple of the Holy Spirit, a manifestation of divine beauty”* (CCC 2519). **It is our inner life which is what sets us apart from the animals. That’s why as Catholics we don’t just confess external sins, but also the sinful thoughts in our minds and hearts.** Why do we do what we do? To get to the heart of the matter, to the moral root of evil, that is what Jesus is challenging us to do today in the Gospel passage from St. Mark. The true battleground is the heart as Jesus points out: good or evil flows out of man’s heart. As the Catechism says, *Baptism confers on us the beginning of righteousness, but the battle against the*

*concupiscence of the flesh and disordered desires continues throughout life, but with God's grace we will prevail. How so? One:* if we root our lives in the virtue and **gift of chastity** which enables us to love ourselves and others with an upright and undivided heart, to be integrated and have a sense of self-mastery in the sexual area of life - **sins gravely contrary to chastity** are *masturbation, fornication, i.e., pre-marital sex, pornography, homosexual relations, adultery, contraception and sterilization, and living together with someone who is not our spouse and yet being sexually active with that person* (CCC 2395-96. The whole sexual area of life is objectively serious because of how sacred this area is to God as it is how new human life is brought into existence. Not something to be taken lightly – even though the modern world doesn't see that essential truth. If we consciously fall in this area with full reflection and freedom of the will, we need to get to Confession ASAP and before we receive our Lord in Holy Communion, and we need to humbly ask our Lord to bless us with a deeper purity of mind and body. **Two:** if we have a **purity of intention** which consists of **seeking to find and to fulfill God's will in everything**. **Three:** by **purity of vision**, external and internal, by disciplining our feelings and imagination so as to refuse all complicity in morally disordered thoughts, i.e., all the sins that originate in our heart and mind, and often do lead to evil outward actions which Jesus mentions in the Gospel today - see the list at the beginning of this homily. **Four:** By **prayer and frequent recourse to the Sacrament of Confession**; only in humbly asking God daily for the gift of a pure heart and admitting our sinfulness regularly in the Sacrament of Penance given for that purpose will we have the necessary courage, strength, and willpower to consistently choose the good. **The battle to purify our hearts is difficult but necessary - if we want to get to Heaven someday.** May the Lord give us the grace and assistance of the Holy Spirit daily to purify our hearts in His holy love and truth. God bless you.