

COLORFUL SCRIPTURE

September 1, 2024

Jesus Helps Us Get to the Heart of the Matter

Based on: Dt 4:1-2, 6-8; Jas 1:17-18, 21b-22, 27; Mk 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

By Marianne Couture

Getting to the heart of the matter. It's what's on the inside that counts, not what's on the outside.

In this Sunday's Gospel, some of the Pharisees complain to Jesus that his disciples have been eating without performing the Jewish purification ritual (cleansing custom). They tell him the Jewish law demands a ritual washing of hands before meals.

Each Jewish home had a stone jar of clean water used only for these cleansing rituals.

A person had to hold his or her hands with the fingertips pointing up while the water was poured over them. The person then made a fist with one hand and rubbed it against the other hand for washing. Now the water was considered unclean because it had touched unclean hands. The fingertips were then turned downward and water was poured over them to finish the washing custom. Pots, pans, and cups were washed just the way dirty dishes were usually washed and then they were also washed using the cleansing ritual.

Jesus replies it is more important to purify one's heart than one's hands. Jesus is not against washing hands before meals or washing the dishes. What he is against is the purification rituals which actually focus attention in the wrong direction.

Jesus says what really matters is what is in our hearts - and the actions that come from our hearts. The Pharisees concentrated on the outside signs of the law. Jesus concentrates on the inside of the heart.

Rules and rituals are helpful to live a good Christian life, but Jesus wants us to think about the way we treat others and show his love to others. He says dirt on the outside does not make someone unclean on the inside. What is important to God is what goes on inside our hearts. When we act selfishly, say something mean, or are unkind to others, these actions make our hearts unclean. It's not easy to admit the sin that is within our hearts, but we don't have to be afraid. Jesus is always ready to forgive us when we say we're sorry and to give us his grace to do better.

At Mass today, ask Jesus to help you have a clean heart so that you can truly share his love with others.

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