

XXII ORDINARY TIME- 2nd September 2018

YOU LEAVE THE COMMANDMENT OF GOD AND HOLD TO THE TRADITION OF MAN. - Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

Mark 7,1-8.14-15.21-23

Now when the Pharisees gathered to him, with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem, they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands properly, holding to the tradition of the elders, and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches.) And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?" And he said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, "'This people honours me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'

You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men."

And he called the people to him again and said to them, "Hear me, all of you, and understand: There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him.

And he said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

Every time that Jesus communicates life enemies of life appear and they are the religious leaders. It is what the evangelist Mark writes in his gospel chapter 7. He writes "*..the Pharisees gathered to him, with some of the scribes..*" for the verb "gathered" the evangelist uses the Greek word "synago", hence the term "synagogue", to make it clear that the following is the fruit of the teaching done in the synagogue. Around him gathered "*..the Pharisees..*" they are lay people who observe all the 613 precepts extrapolated from the law of Moses and for this they separated from the rest of the people, "*..with some of the scribes..*" the official theologians come from no less that Jerusalem, the important city. And what will be the gravity of the case? "*.. they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed.*" It is not a question of hygiene, but a religious ritual. An entire part of the Talmud involves how to wash hands, the quantity of water, the modality, etc., and the accusation they make to Jesus is "*Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders,*" For the Jews, Moses on Sinai had received the law and in the written form, the first five books of the Bible, and in the oral form, that

afterwards finished in the Talmud, being the teachings, this is the tradition of the elders.

“..but eat with defiled hands?” Jesus’ reply at the beginning seems a compliment, he replies *“Well did Isaiah prophesy of you...”* so far seems a compliment then the come down *“.. hypocrites..”* The word hypocrite in that time did not have the moral meaning it has now, it meant theatre actors, the masks worn by actors. So it should translate "theatrical", "you are comedians, all this fiction of religion is only a theatre". And the accusation that is taken by the prophet Isaiah is that *“This people honours me with their lips, but their heart is far from me;”* the heart in the Jewish culture is the brain

“...in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.””So it does not come from God: passed off that which is divine authority for what is human, and while the accusation they have made is not to observe the tradition of the ancients, for Jesus they are only *“.. commandments of men.”* Jesus then continues *“You leave the commandment of God..”* God’s commandment is that of love, to him and to others, *“..and hold to the tradition of men.”* They pretend that human traditions proceed from God for their power, to dominate, to set their religiosity to mankind.

Their desire for power comes first before the interest of God and men. Then Jesus continues *“..he called the people to him again and said to them,”* and then there are two imperative verbs to hear and to understand *““Hear me, all of you, and understand: There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him,..”* What Jesus says is grave, why? There is in the book of Leviticus, chapter eleven, dedicated to food, what animals that cannot be eaten because they are impure and make man impure. So Jesus passes from the spoken law to the written law.

So much so that even here is a passage that unfortunately the liturgical version inexplicably, incomprehensibly omitted, the disciples then questioned him on the parable.. They have accepted the teaching to break with the oral law, but the written one is the word of God, that one is untouchable, and therefore they think that Jesus spoke with a parable, but Jesus did not speak with a parable. And here there is a phrase spoken by Jesus that only the evangelist Mark has *“Thus he declared all foods clean.”*(Mark 7,19) If Jesus makes all foods pure it means that what is written in the book of Leviticus, chapter 11, is wrong, or rather it does not reflect the divine will, and this is very serious because if one begins to distinguish one does not know then where one is going to end.

And them, here Jesus gives the teaching: that which makes a man impure or not. Jesus had said *“Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?”* (Mark 7, 18-19) That which makes a man impure is not a food, but that which comes from man. And here Jesus lists twelve ways without regard for culture, religion, twelve ways that make man impure, preventing the communication with God, they are

“...evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.” Foolishness is to hoard for oneself rather than sharing with others. And then Jesus’ statement *“All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”* Therefore for Jesus the distinction between pure and impure does not proceed from God: impurity comes from a bad relationship with others.