

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Today's Gospel follows right on the heels of last week's Gospel. In that Gospel, you recall, Jesus corrected the Pharisees and chided them for burdening the people with new laws not given by God but made up by men. He upbraided them for "*leaving the commandment of God and holding to the tradition of men.*" You're "*making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down.*"

Jesus continues with the people today, extending His remarks to God's law that deals with foods specifically, but we might say that concerns ceremonial law, more generally. "*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.*" By this, Mark adds, Jesus "*declared all foods clean.*"

You can imagine how tough such language was for pious Jews to hear. They had been taught what Moses taught concerning foods: some are clean and okay to eat and some are not. Things that chewed the cud and had a cloven hoof were clean — Jews could eat them. So cattle can be eaten, but not a pig, and not a rabbit. Certain fish could be eaten, if they had scales and fins. Otherwise not—sorry shellfish lovers. Most carrion fowl could not be eaten. Certain insects could be eaten; others not. Various crawling things, snakes and lizards, could not, etc.

But now Jesus was saying, this distinction between clean and unclean foods is gone. Jesus declared all food clean. It was reinforced later, after Jesus had risen from the dead and ascended into heaven—though the disciples still struggled with this teaching. In the Book of Acts, the disciples were out spreading the word of the kingdom of God, you might recall, and Peter had a vision at the home of Simon the tanner. Down came a sheet from heaven, and on it were all sorts of animals, reptiles and birds. He was told to "*kill and eat,*" but Peter replied, "*By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.*" But Jesus spoke to him from heaven, saying, "*What God has made clean, do not call common.*" And don't be fooled — the same word is being used here as in our Gospel, just translated two different ways: in Mark it gets translated as "defiled" and in Acts it's translated as "common." The same point, though, is being made: it's not what goes into your mouth from the outside that defiles you, that makes you unclean.

Why is that? Because Jesus' coming has done away with all these kinds of ceremonial laws. Food laws? Fulfilled in Jesus. You can now eat pork and shellfish. You can eat beef cooked medium with blood juices running. And you should now eat Jesus' flesh and drink His blood in the Sacrament He has instituted. Sabbath laws? Fulfilled in Jesus. It's okay to pluck grain on the Sabbath. It's okay to worship on the Lord's Day, that is, the first day, the day of Jesus' resurrection, instead of the Sabbath Day, that is, the seventh day. Those who teach that it's a sin to worship on any day other than the seventh day are simply ignoring what Jesus

came to do. It's okay to rescue a sheep on the Sabbath. It's okay to heal on the Sabbath. Indeed, Jesus says, "*it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.*"

This is how St. Paul puts it: "*let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath.*" And why shouldn't they judge you? Because "[t]hese are a **shadow** of the things to come, but the **substance** belongs to Christ." Because all of these things were there to point our way to Christ. **We've got Christ now!** He came; He died; He rose; He reigns. Stop hanging onto shadows when you've got the substance, the real thing!

So, Jesus says, stop worrying about these external things; it's not the external things that defile a person. They don't defile because they just enter the mouth, go through the digestive system, and get expelled. They don't defile because they don't enter the heart, Jesus says!

But let's be careful about applying Jesus' words too broadly, as if nothing ever external can defile a person. Jesus is talking about food here; but, for example, the eyes are described as a gateway to the heart when Peter prays about: "*having the eyes of your hearts enlightened ....*" Here the eyes are being put to a good use, but the Scriptures also speak of eyes that are darkened. Beware of what you put into your hearts by what you read with them or look at with them. Similarly, our hearts can be enflamed with ungodly passions with ears that listen to unsound teaching that seeks to steal away our Christ. Beware, and seek out sound teachers.

And don't forget our struggle against the devil himself, against his scheming ways, "*against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*"

We do walk in danger all the way; we have enemies all around us. And I have to admit that, when Luther penned his explanation to the Sixth Petition of the Lord's Prayer: "*And lead us not into temptation,*" and he talks about our enemies, "*the devil, the world, and our sinful nature,*" that they "*may not deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice,*" I always thought that he listed the toughest enemy first, the devil, and then the world—the external things we see and hear, right—and then finally our sinful self.

But with what Jesus says in our Gospel, I'm thinking "*our sinful nature*" is, in fact, our worst and toughest enemy. In fact, our sinful nature was our enemy before the devil was, right? We were born dead in sins and trespasses, born sinful and unclean. For us, like with little Jacob today, the devil didn't become our enemy until we were blessed with true faith in our spirits, our sins drowned in the great flood of baptism, and we were "*sundered from the number of the unbelieving, preserved dry and secure in the holy ark of Christendom.*" In baptism, Luther says, sure we've driven the devil "*away from the little child,*" but we've also burdened him "*with ... a mighty and lifelong enemy.*"

And this is the way the devil seems to work (and the world does, too): he tries to sow seeds of distrust in us, throwing water on these seeds that the fire of our faith might be dowsed, and with his scheming he fires up passions that lie within us, defiling passions that erupt “*out of the heart of man*” in the forms of *evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.*”

And these are what defile us. In the words of the comic strip character Pogo: “*We have met the enemy, and he is us.*” We are our own worse enemy, for the source of our defilement is we and what comes out of our hearts. The chief sin is the sin that we are born with. St. Paul calls it “*your old self, ... corrupt through deceitful desires ....*” And Paul virtually reproduces Jesus’ list of defiling passions. In catechism terms we call that internal sin, original sin or the Old Adam. In liturgical terms we say that we are “*poor, miserable sinners,*” or that “*we are by nature, sinful and unclean.*”

This is the chief sin; it’s not as much what we do as who we are. And this chief sin is, all by itself, worthy of condemnation. And more than that, Luther reminds us that all other sins, even “*unbelief, false faith, idolatry, being without the fear of God, pride, despair, utter blindness, and in short, not knowing or regarding God,*” all are the fruits of this chief sin.

Truly it’s not all the external stuff so much that defiles man, but what comes from within, from the fleshly heart of man; and yet, on the other hand, the solution must be external. After all, since Jesus says our defilement comes from within, surely we should not seek our righteousness there. Solomon asks, “*Who can say, ‘I have made my heart pure; I am clean from my sin’?*” The answer is “*no one!*”

The answer is that our righteousness, our salvation must lie outside of us. Our salvation lies with God Himself, in Christ alone — “*there is no other name under heaven by which we must be saved.*” It is by grace alone — that means it’s a gift of God. We are corrupt. Our hearts are stone. We need to be **given** a new heart. The Lord says, “*I will sprinkle clean water on you ... I will **give** you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you.*” Or as David teaches us as he prays in his great penitential psalm, “*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.*” This is all gift language — it’s not your doing; it’s not your work.

Truly, since we are corrupt to the very core, the solution cannot come from within us. It must come from outside of us. It’s not just that we are flawed in our human nature, such that a little repair job will suffice. No! We are dead in our sins and trespasses. But God makes alive. You have been made alive; you have been made new in the forgiveness of your sins by Him who took on your debt and paid it in full. You have been made alive in Him who set aside your debt by nailing it to a cross. You have been made alive by Him who defeated and disarmed “*this world’s prince,*” triumphing over him by passing through death to life.

Jesus has earned all of this for you, that He might also give you a new heart, that you might be pure in heart, and that you might at length see God. God has cleansed you from all your transgressions, by the sacrifice of Him whose blood cleanses us from all our sins, and now He distributes what He earned to you — in still more things that are outside of you, for not only do these things not defile you, but Christ Himself has instituted their use, that by these external things He might distribute His grace, for Jesus tells us that something special happens when that external thing happens to you—like in Holy Baptism. Though water is poured on you externally, when that water is connected up with the word of God, it is no simple water. It is a water that takes hearts and minds set on the flesh, and turns them into hearts filled with the Holy Spirit and into minds set on the Spirit. With our bodies washed with this pure water of Holy Baptism, our hearts are being sprinkled clean from an evil conscience, and we are able to draw near with a true heart in the full assurance of faith. That's what we celebrate today with Jacob.

Of course, we do sin still — the Old Adam does not die willingly. That's what makes that sinful nature also a lifelong enemy. And so our hearts need to be cleansed again and again — and they are as we remember our baptisms in daily contrition and repentance, drown our old sinful self, and hold fast to Christ's promise of forgiveness, or when we confess our sins here at church, and we hear the word of Christ's absolution and believe that for His sake we are truly clean.

And our new heart is gladdened with the Lord's wine that carries His blood poured out for you, and our heart is strengthened with the bread that hosts His body broken—real food and real drink that gives eternal life, real food and real drink that, when we feed on these in faith, we have what Jesus promises: forgiveness, life, salvation.

Inside/outside. Seems an odd theme for a sermon—that's what I've called it. God grant us mouths to confess the truth conveyed in His word, the truth that acknowledges that it's what's **inside** of us that's the problem, and how that defiles us; but especially the truth that it's God's work **outside** of us, by Jesus, by His sacrifice, and then by His **external** words of eternal life, by the water that flows forth from Him and sprinkles us clean, by the food and drink that He gives for the life of the world, that He saves us, that our hearts are made right before Him. And God grant that from these new hearts of faith, we may show forth the love of God in Christ Jesus unto all the world.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.