

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

I think it is safe to say that most of us, if not all of us, have heard at one time or another, that old excuse for not going to church...“there are just too many hypocrites in there,” or “those people, in there, all think they are better than everyone else.” Jesus reminds us that,

²¹ “For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come...²³ All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.” (Mark 7:21a, 23)

I would agree, in that I think we reveal so much of our true self in the way and in the things, we say to, and about one another. Listen again to the criticisms of the church, “there are just too many hypocrites in there,” or “those people, in there, all think they are better than everyone else.”

So, in saying these things, one is actually criticizing others for the very thing they themselves are doing. What they are actually saying is that they themselves are better than those folks in that church...and they themselves are being hypocritical. So, to that comment about the church I always say, well, come on in and join us, we can always use more hypocrites.

I want to begin with the response of Jesus to the Pharisees and the scribes and then pick up and continue with what I talked about last week concerning our Holy Eucharist in light of what Jesus is saying to *us* in our context today.

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Our minds, or our egos at times will mislead us into thinking more highly of our self, nonetheless, from deep within our hearts, our true self comes oozing out at times in our speech and our actions. There are just too many hypocrites in there...those people all think they are better than everyone else...while these comments are intended to point to the hypocritical nature of “THOSE” in the church, it is actually saying more about the hypocritical nature of the person making the comment.

We can hear the Pharisees and the scribes think highly of themselves simply because they wash their hands. They seem to be saying, our hands are not defiled...nor are we, but you are because you don't do as we do. They criticize those eating with defiled hands, but nowhere in all the ancient Jewish Laws does it say that one must wash their hands thoroughly. One can however read in the Book of Exodus that the priests washed their hands and feet before they entered the tent of meeting, or before they approached the altar. In turn, by Jesus' day certain practices then had arisen among *some* Jews and became a law according to human precepts. This also became a ritual in Christian worship...and still holds true today in this act known as Lavabo, what I do before I approach the altar. While hand washing is not a Divine Commandment, one can certainly make the argument that washing one's hands thoroughly is just good hygiene but certainly NOT Jewish Law...nor a commandment of God.¹

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The rebuttal of Jesus to the Pharisees and Scribes about hand washing has been edited out of our lesson today, but Jesus says this to them:

⁹ ... 'You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition! (Mark 7:9b)

Likewise, we make assumptions about our faith and our assumptions become our human precepts we call Christian doctrine and in doing so, we abandon God and hold fast to our human traditions. Mat we keep in mind that each and every week, with our outstretched-metaphorically-defiled-hands we come to this table and we receive the very body and blood of Jesus Christ at his command. His command that was made known on the night he was betrayed Jesus said, "do this in remembrance of me." This Holy Meal is NOT a human precept, it is God Incarnate saying to us, this *is* my body, this *is* my blood, given FOR you! By this divine command, God Incarnate, Jesus Christ abides in us and we in Him. By this divine command, in this Holy Meal, we are given grace and forgiveness, we are given the promise of new life at the time of our death...but WHAT NOW?!

What happens after this moment? As we go from this table, this moment of sheer grace, what is it that we understand about this meal, what do we do then, what do we think? How is this moment of grace, given to us...how is this manifest in our lives as we go from here into the world and the culture out there?

Does this moment distinguish us? Does it really make us better...does this moment distinguish us from all other hypocrites?

I go back to what I said last week about our Holy Eucharist when I asked, when we are fed the body and blood of Jesus Christ does it really separate us and teach us to hate the others? Does this Holy Eucharist enable us to hypocritically judge others? When we are fed the body and blood of Jesus Christ does it aspire us to better ourselves by belittling our neighbor or does it aspire us to love our neighbor? As we go from this Holy Meal of grace given freely to us, this grace is not made manifest by blaming our neighbor, hating our neighbor, or conforming our neighbor to our personal opinions.

In this meal our very souls are fed the bread of life and the cup of salvation that is Jesus Christ...His flesh, His words, and His actions are a way for us to see reality. When we eat his flesh and drink his blood in the Holy Eucharist we live in the reality of that flesh and blood, the flesh and blood that DOES NOT distinguish us, rather this flesh and blood makes us participants, rather it makes us part of the very body and blood of Jesus Christ...a body that is broken and given for others who are hypocrites just like us all. When we live in the reality of this flesh and blood that is given for us, may we live and make manifest the same mindset as Christ as St Paul writes to the Philippians:

^{2:1} If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, ² make my joy complete:

be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. ⁵ Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, ⁷ but emptied

himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, ⁸he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:1-8)

Do we fool ourselves by convincing ourselves that what we pick and choose from our pet human precepts and doctrines enable us to judge and conclude that “those” hypocrites are fundamentally wrong. Meantime, as we conclude this about others, we ourselves have jettisoned a very fundamental distinctive characteristic of God.

Yes, we know that God is almighty, sovereign, omnipotent, and omniscient, and this is the characteristic of God we like, we want, and what we tried to take from God in the garden. But as we hold onto that almighty, sovereign, omnipotent, and omniscient apple, may we also take a step back and remember that when we fall down in our sin of attempting to hold onto this almighty apple, we hide in our sin and shame, but this is where we learn of that one distinctive characteristic of God that we overlook, that the God we worship is also a loving God. God is not only loving...God is also seeking, searching, and saving those whom God loves...and that is every hypocrite like me and like you and like all those hypocrites out there. And this is the part of God that we have a difficult time making manifest in our lives. This is where we all fall...you, me, and all the hypocrites like each of us...we all metaphorically fall at the foot of the cross.

And yet even in our fall we see in the crucifixion, God’s grace for us does not die, it puts an end to our human nature and raises us to newness of life. St. Paul speaks of this in his second letter to his dear brother in Christ, Timothy:

⁸ Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead.....that is my gospel, ⁹ for which I suffer hardship, even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But the word of God is not chained. ¹⁰ Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, so that they may also obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. ¹¹ The saying is sure:
If we have died with him, we will also live with him;
¹² if we endure, we will also reign with him;
if we deny him, he will also deny us;
¹³ if we are faithless, he remains faithful—
for he cannot deny himself. (2 Timothy 2:8-13)

Nonetheless, even knowing the power of God’s grace given to us in Jesus Christ, we continue to *defend* our faith out there as a god that is conformed to our human precepts, based on a god that is ONLY almighty, sovereign, omnipotent, and omniscient. This remains the characteristic of God we like, we want, and we use. But look deeper into the very words we say each week in the second petition of our creed concerning the nature of Jesus:

He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.
He descended into hell.
On the third day he rose again.
He ascended into heaven,
and is *seated at the right hand of the Father.*²

² Italicized for emphasis only.

As we think about Jesus seated at the right hand of God, we might see this as a statement about rule and authority. But it's also a statement about the nature of God's love for us.³ Seated there, at the right hand of the Father, is the one who took on our lot, our nature, or our sin and is the one who has made a seat for each of us in His Father's mansion. Seated next to God is God's love for us, a love made manifest in the one who sought the lost sheep, associated with and among the sinners, who was himself homeless, who reached toward the unloved, and healed the sick and suffering. We confess that this one who sits at the right hand of the Father, and in the power of the Holy Spirit works with the Father as the embodiment of the Father's love for us.

Yes, there are far too many hypocrites in here and out there, but we are not better than anyone else, nor is any one better than us. We are however the same as everyone who has been washed thoroughly from their iniquity by the very grace and steadfast love; according to God's abundant mercy made known in Jesus Christ. In the almighty power of God made known in Jesus Christ, God has blotted out our transgressions. And in doing so, God has created in us all a clean heart, and put a new and right spirit within us all. We are not cast away from God's presence, nor is God's Holy Spirit taken from us...it is here with us in the proclamation of this Word and says to us in this Holy Meal, this is my body, this is my blood, this is how much I love you...and this is given for you.

May this be our reality as we go from here...rather than being threatened and overcome by the notion of what is correct and or what is better. May we draw strength in our faith and turn to what is in our heart and find the faith that cleanses us of all our sins, sustains us and carries us through our struggles and challenges...may we find that this is the faith in Jesus Christ, God's love for us all that assures us of the hope of life everlasting.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

³ William H. Willimon in his commentary in *Pulpit Resource*, for the 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time in 2012 makes this wonderful observation of the love seated at the right hand of God in the Apostles' Creed.