

My Dear People of God,

Welcome to the Twenty Second Sunday of Ordinary which launches us into the last segment of Ordinary Time. After a detour of five weeks into the Gospel of John (*the Bread of Life Discourse*), today we return to the Gospel of Mark. In the gospel reading today, we have a very important instruction from Jesus on the centrality of love and the danger of hypocrisy. Love flows from the heart and as such Jesus calls for a relationship that flows from the heart. ***“This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me”.***

In modern education, we tend to attach more importance to the head and less to the heart. As a result, the heart gets very little attention and we end up with a child that is clever rather than a child that is good! The world of business and politics, rewards cleverness rather than goodness. And yet in our everyday language, we acknowledge the primacy of the heart. Let us take a few examples of this.

We judge people by the heart; and a result one of the most damning things we can say about a person is that *‘they have no heart’*, or that *‘they have a cold heart’* or that, *‘they have a hard heart’*. On the other hand, one of the best things we can say about someone is that, *‘they have a heart’*, or that, *‘they are warm hearted’*, or that, *‘they are soft hearted’*

We judge the degree of peoples commitment to something in terms of the heart. Where there is no commitment, we tend to say, *‘his/her heart is not in it’*, or we say, *‘he/she is only half hearted’*. On the other hand, where there is commitment, we tend to say; *‘his/her heart is in it’*, or that, *‘his/her heart is in it’*.

In the same vein, we describe sorrow and joy in terms of the heart. We say, *‘her heart was broken’* or *‘he went with a heavy heart’* or *‘her heart overflowed with joy’*. These are not descriptions of peoples cardio vesicular conditions.

In the gospel reading of today, there are two telling examples of this heart condition. The first is in the area of worship. The most damning thing that can be said about one’s worship is that the persons heart is not in it. That means their worship is an act of lip-service like the Pharisees. On the other hand, one of the best things that can be said about someone’s worship is that it comes from the heart.

The second concerns goodness and badness. A corrupt heart is the worst form of badness. It means bad to the core. A pure heart is the best kind of goodness. It means to be good at the core.

Jesus in the gospel today therefore places great emphasis on the heart, that interior place within us. The heart is the source from which all our thoughts, words and deeds flow from. If the heart is clean, then all that flows from it is clean, like water flowing from a pure spring and the opposite is true. The Pharisees paid more attention to the outside than the inside. They were more pre-occupied with having clean hands than having clean hearts.

Jesus therefore taught that the source of evil is within us and its root is in the heart. We cant guard ourselves from it by merely by separation from others. All those horrible things He lists and which we experience, hear and read in the newspapers; evil thoughts, unchastity, theft,

murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, folly. But if the source of evil is within us, so too is the source of good. All our thoughts, words and deeds flow from the heart, like water from a hidden clean stream.

As we continue on our journey of faith, on this 22nd Sunday, Jesus calls us to strive for cleanness of heart. This begins with an honest examination of ourselves leading to a good celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation that cleanses and purifies us. May the Lord grant us the grace to attain clean and pure hearts.

Thanks and God bless

Fr. Simon Peter