

THE *Wednesday* WORD



Encountering Christ The Wednesday Prayer Custom for Homes, Schools & Parishes

Prayerfully preparing for Sunday Mass with special prayers for our school families



Set aside 10-15 minutes and create a suitable environment by removing any distractions. Make sure that you are comfortable. Perhaps light a candle. Make the sign of the cross and remain still for a minute of settling silence.



Remember that through this scripture our Lord is truly present. Read the Gospel, aloud and slowly, and pay attention to any words that stand out. If any do, meditate on them for a few minutes and be invited into a dialogue with God.

1

Read

The Gospel for Sunday 1st September 2024

THE TRUE PURPOSE OF THE LAW

The Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered round Jesus, and they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with unclean hands, that is, without washing them. For the Pharisees, and the Jews in general, follow the tradition of the elders and never eat without washing their arms as far as the elbow; and on returning from the market place they never eat without first sprinkling themselves. There are also many other observances which have been handed down to them concerning the washing of cups and pots and bronze dishes. So these Pharisees and scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not respect the tradition of the elders but eat their food with unclean hands?" He answered, "It was of you hypocrites that Isaiah so rightly prophesied in this passage of scripture: 'This people honours me only with lip-service, while their hearts are far from me. The worship they offer me is worthless; the doctrines they teach are only human regulations'. You put aside the commandment of God to cling to human traditions." He called the people to him again and said, "Listen to me, all of you, and understand. Nothing that goes into a man from outside can make him unclean; it is the things that come out of a man that make him unclean. For it is from within, from men's hearts, that evil intentions emerge: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, malice, deceit, indecency, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within and make a man unclean."

Taken from Mark 7:1-8. 14-15. 21-23 The Twenty Second Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B

2

Reflect

After reading the Gospel, did any words stand out? If they did, ponder or discuss them before proceeding with the reflection.

Legal observance has its dangers, for it is sometimes easy to obey the law exactly while forgetting its purpose. It is no good driving doggedly just below the speed-limit while endangering life and limb. The more exact the law, the greater is the temptation to manipulate it to evade its purpose. The Pharisees were as aware of this danger of distortion as is the modern stickler for exact observance. The Pharisees have a bad press in the gospels because, at the time the gospels were written, hostility between Christians and Pharisaic Judaism was at its height. During Jesus' own lifetime their opposition was not so obvious. For instance, they had no share in the Passion and Crucifixion of Jesus. In any case, Jesus' own final saying here, while it may apply to the Jewish ritual Law, has much wider application than the observance of Jewish rules for clean food. It is more akin to the saying in Matthew: 'A sound tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor a rotten tree bear good fruit. By their fruits you shall know them'. A person's true qualities are seen by that person's actions; their true intentions and character, which comes from the heart, become visible in their words and actions. **What sort of things would manifest a heart centred on Christ?**

Dom Henry Wansbrough OSB

3

Respond & Request

Now slowly and prayerfully read the Gospel once again but this time in silence. Consider how this Gospel could apply to your life in general. Thank God for any insight you may have received.

Then ask God to bless you with a spiritual gift to help you act on any resolution you have made. Perhaps: love, hope, understanding, wisdom, faithfulness, peace, patience, humility, joy, forgiveness, self-control, courage, generosity, faith or something else.

4

Pray for Families

This Wednesday's word for our school families is HOLINESS!

After praying for your loved ones, please remember to pray for our present and future Church, particularly for the families connected to our schools. You may want to conclude this special weekly time with a simple prayer such as:

St Joseph, Patron Saint of Families and Protector of the Church, pray for us. Mary, Star of Evangelisation, pray for us. Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

WEDNESDAY WORD PLUS †

Fr Henry's reflections on the first and second readings of **Sunday 1st September 2024**



1st Reading: Deuteronomy 4:1-2. 6-8

The Gift of the Law

Moses said to the people, "Now, Israel, take notice of the laws and customs that I teach you today, and observe them, that you may have life and may enter and take possession of the land that the Lord the God of your fathers is giving you. You must add nothing to what I command you, and take nothing from it, but keep the commandments of the Lord your God just as I lay them down for you. Keep them, observe them, and they will demonstrate to the peoples your wisdom and understanding. When they come to know of all these laws they will exclaim, 'No other people is as wise and prudent as this great nation.' And indeed, what great nation is there that has its gods so near as the Lord our God is to us whenever we call to him? And what great nation is there that has laws and customs to match this whole Law that I put before you today?"



What was special about the Law laid down for Israel? Many of the laws are strikingly similar to those found in law codes of peoples of the Ancient Near East: they are written on stone or clay tablets and recently discovered; some are more primitive, some more sophisticated. Running through them all, however, are two threads about relations with the divine and with others. So in the Law of Israel, if you want to be the People of God, this is the way you must live - to be like him and keep company with him and be his very own. The Law, then, was a testimony of love, and obedience to it is an expression of grateful love: 'Be holy as I am holy'. A second thread is respect for human dignity: in the Israelite code this is especially the respect shown to the poor and needy; in other law codes nobles have more honour and privilege than commoners, free men and women than slaves. In Israel all are owed equal respect, and every faithful Israelite must remember that God's protecting hand hovers over those who are in any misfortune: since they are created in the image of God, a person must treat the widow, the orphan and the immigrant as God treated them when you were strangers in Egypt. All this was enshrined in the written Law, interpreted by the oral traditions of the elders - not always successfully, as we see happens in the gospel.

What have love and holiness in common? What is distinctive about the Law of the Old Testament? What does Jesus mean when he says that he came "not to abolish the Law but to fulfil it"?



2nd Reading: James 1:17-18. 21-22. 27

Putting the Word into Action

It is all that is good, everything that is perfect, which is given us from above; it comes down from the Father of all light; with him there is no such thing as alteration, no shadow of a change. By his own choice he made us his children by the message of the truth so that we should be a sort of first-fruits of all that he had created. Accept and submit to the word which has been planted in you and can save your souls. But you must do what the word tells you, and not just listen to it and deceive yourselves. Pure unspoilt religion, in the eyes of God our Father is this: coming to the help of orphans and widows when they need it, and keeping oneself uncontaminated by the world.



For the next few weeks we will be reading the Letter of James, the longest of the seven so-called 'catholic' epistles, written not to any particular person or community but to the Church universal, throughout the world (which is what 'catholic' means). The real author is unknown, but it purports to come from James, the first leader of the Jerusalem community after Peter's departure. As we know from Paul's letter to the Galatians, James continued to value the Jewish way of life and observance of the Law, even while following Jesus. The letter accordingly contains many practical lessons about fulfilling the Law of Christ, stressing especially - as at the end of this reading - the need to care for the poor and the weak. The letter is full of striking, pithy images, like that of looking in the mirror and then going off and forgetting what one saw (verses 23-24, verses omitted from today's reading). The author applies this to care of the poor: it is no good glancing at the Law and then claiming to be religious while neglecting those in need. True religion consists not in 'piety' but in putting one's beliefs into action.

What does it mean to believe in Christ, and how may we put that belief into action?

True religion consists not in 'piety' but in putting one's beliefs into action.

The Wednesday Word Connecting Home, School & Parish through the Word of God

**The Wednesday Word is under the patronage of St Joseph, Patron Saint of Families and Protector of the Church
Within the tradition of the Catholic Church, each Wednesday is dedicated to St Joseph**