

Twenty Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Dear brothers and sisters,

There are times in our individual lives and in the lives of our communities when we need to recover what is truly important. We can all lose sight of what really matters and give ourselves over to what is of much lesser value. I do not know if we are all familiar with the expression, **“missing the wood for the trees.” (=to not understand or appreciate a larger situation, problem, etc., because one is considering only a few parts of it).** This is true in the area of our faith, as well as in every other area of our life. It can happen when we attach too much importance to **some** expressions of faith and not enough importance to other expressions of faith.

In the gospel reading, Jesus accuses the religious leaders of His days for doing just that. They are giving more importance to various human religious traditions than to the Word of God. As Jesus says, **“You put aside the commandment of God to give attention to human traditions.”** Jesus was saying to them that what was important to them was not so important to God, whereas what was important to God was not so important to them. In other words, they were doing in a very opposite way to the way God wanted them to observe His ways and commandments.

The central question when it comes to our relationship with God is, ‘What does God want?’ How does God want me to live, to behave? It may not always be easy to answer this question, but it is worth asking it. **Jesus came among us to show us what God wants for our lives.**

In today’s gospel reading, He points us in the direction of what God wants from us. He suggests that **what really matters to God is what is in our hearts, our inner core.** He quotes from his own religious tradition, the prophet Isaiah, to show that this is what God has always wanted, **‘This people honor me with their lip-service, while their hearts are far from me’.**

In spite of the fine sounding words that come from their lips in prayer, their hearts were not given over to God. **Their hearts did not belong to God, and that Belonging to God is what the observance of the God’s commandments has to do in our lives, whenever we pray or listen and meditate the Word of God.** Their hearts were not set in the right place.

The religious leaders in the gospel reading were very concerned with **“the tradition of the elders”.** They criticized Jesus’ disciples for not showing respect for this tradition, by their failure to observe some rituals relating to the washing of hands before eating. Yet, for all their concern about these religious traditions, Jesus could see that their hearts were not given over to God. They had not allowed God to live and dwell in their hearts. Instead of being the temple of God, their hearts were transformed into the temples of their idols, which were their own traditions, their own teachings. If not, they would not have been so critical of Jesus’ disciples.

Dear brothers and sisters,

What God really wants, is a heart that is open to receiving God’s abundant love and a heart from which God’s love is then poured out upon others, our brothers and sisters. Remember,

when Jesus was asked once, 'What is the greatest commandment in the Law?' He said "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all you mind", and, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself". If we are able to do so, then the Word and Commandments of God are being fulfilled in our lives, and we will be consoling the heart of Jesus.