

# Sunday Connection



## Twenty-Second Sunday of Ordinary Time, Cycle B

Sunday, September 2, 2018

### Readings & Background

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#### **This Sunday's Readings**

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#### **First Reading**

*Deuteronomy 4:1-2,6-8*

Moses tells the Israelites to observe the commandments that God gave them.

#### **Responsorial Psalm**

*Psalm 15:2-3,3-4,4-5*

Those who do justice will find favor with God.

#### **Second Reading**

*James 1:17-18,21b-22,27*

James teaches that Christians should be doers of the Word.

## **Gospel Reading**

*Mark 7:1-8,14-15,21-23*

Jesus teaches that it is that which comes from our hearts that defiles us.

## **Background on the Gospel Reading**

This Sunday, our lectionary returns to Mark's Gospel after a number of Sundays in which we heard the Bread of Life discourse from the Gospel of John. Recall that we focus on the Gospel of Mark in Lectionary Cycle B, but substitute John's report of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes for Mark's report of this event.

In today's Gospel, Mark provides a significant amount of information about the Jewish observance of ritual-purity laws. Most scholars believe that Mark includes this information because his audience includes Gentile Christians who have no knowledge or experience of these laws. We can infer, therefore, that many in Mark's community were not Jewish Christians.

In this Gospel, Mark addresses the question of which Jewish practices would also be observed in the newly emerging Christian community. This was a significant question for the early Christian Church, especially in communities that included both Jewish and Gentile converts to Christianity. We also hear this question addressed in the letters of Paul with regard to table fellowship. In Gospel passages such as the one today, we see the Gospel evangelists finding justification for a Christian practice distinct from Judaism in the remembrances of Jesus' teaching and the practice of his first disciples.

Jesus first criticizes the Pharisees for putting human tradition above God's Law. Here, Jesus is referring to the tradition of the elders, the teachings of the Pharisees, which extended the ritual-purity laws of Temple worship to everyday Jewish life. Jesus criticizes the Pharisees for making this tradition equal to and as binding as the Law of Moses.

Next, Jesus comments on the meaning behind the Pharisees' language of holiness—clean and unclean. Jesus teaches that a person is not defiled by the food that enters his or her body, but rather by sin that emerges from his or her words and actions. In this teaching, Jesus unmask a deeper question behind the one posed to him by the Pharisees. The real issue is holiness, which is not found in external acts alone. Holiness comes from

within and is evidenced in the actions and attitudes that emerge from a person's life.

If we read today's Gospel carefully, we will see a pattern in Jesus' teaching method that will be repeated in the weeks ahead. Jesus' first teaching is directed to the Pharisees who questioned him. Jesus' words are then directed to the crowd, teaching that a person is defiled by his or her words and actions, not by the food that he or she eats. In verses omitted in today's reading, we learn that Jesus returned home with his disciples, who in turn questioned him about what he had taught. The words we read at the conclusion of today's Gospel are addressed to Jesus' disciples. Mark's narrative shows several audiences for Jesus' teaching: his antagonists, the crowds, and Jesus' disciples. As we see in this reading, the words to the Pharisees are often words of challenge. The teaching to the crowds is often a general, sometimes cryptic, message. With the disciples, who often misunderstand Jesus' words, further explanation is offered about his message and its meaning.

Jesus' words challenge us as well. In our desire to show that we are holy, we might also give too much credence to externals, following rules without thinking about the intention behind them. Jesus reminds us that we do not make ourselves holy by our actions. Rather, we become holy when we allow God's Spirit to transform us. Our actions should be an expression of the conversion of our heart to God and to God's ways.

## Grades 1-3

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### **Gospel Reading**

[Mark 7:1-8,14-15,21-23](#)

Jesus teaches that it is that which comes from our hearts that defiles us.

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**Making the Connection (Grades 1, 2, and 3)**

Young children are prone to make judgments based on appearances. We can help them understand that we need to look beyond appearances to see the true picture.

### **Materials Needed**

- A fruit or vegetable that has an unusual shape or texture, such as a coconut or knobby-skinned squash
- A paper bag

### **Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings**

1. Before your session, put the fruit or vegetable in the paper bag.
2. Ask the children to describe a tasty food without naming it. Encourage them to use shape, size, texture, taste, and color in their descriptions.
3. Pass around the paper bag and have the children put their hands inside to touch the object. Ask them to say what they think the object would taste like, based on how it feels. When everyone has had a turn, show the children what's inside the bag and describe how it really tastes like. If possible, have some pieces available for the children to taste.
4. Say: *The outward appearance of something does not always give a true picture of what it is like on the inside. In our Gospel reading today, some people called Pharisees criticized Jesus' followers because they didn't do everything that the Pharisees thought good people should do. Listen to the Gospel and try to figure out what Jesus thinks makes people good.*
5. Read today's Gospel, Mark 7:1-8,14-15,21-23.
6. Ask: *What did the Pharisees think that Jesus' disciples should be doing?* (washing their hands before meals) *This was a practice of the Pharisees and of some Jewish people. They washed their hands and food utensils to make them clean, saying special prayers while they did this. They thought that by doing this they were making themselves holy.*
7. Ask: *What did Jesus say was more important than washing one's hands and dishes?* (the words and deeds a person does)
8. Say: *Jesus taught us that God wants to find us doing good things with our lives, such as sharing our toys, thinking kind thoughts, and being*

*truthful. Jesus says that it is not the way we look that is most important. It is what we do and say that shows people that we are a friend of Jesus.*

9. Conclude in prayer together, asking God to help us live our lives in ways that show that we love Jesus. Pray together the [Morning Prayer](#) or the [Act of Love](#).

## Grades 4-6

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### Gospel Reading

[Mark 7:1-8,14-15,21-23](#)

Jesus teaches that it is that which comes from our hearts that defiles us.

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### Making the Connection (Grades 4, 5, and 6)

Older children have learned to follow many rules, but have not always internalized the intention behind these rules. We can help them understand that the attitude and intentions behind their actions are as important as the actions themselves.

### Materials Needed

- None

### Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Ask the children to think about the rules they have to follow in their classroom and at home. Ask: *How do these rules compare? What are some examples of rules that are the same at home and at school?* (Respect those in authority, respect others, be kind, be responsible for yourself.) *What are some examples of rules that are different at home and at school?* (Accept all reasonable answers). *Why do you think some rules are different?* (Accept all reasonable answers.)

2. Say: *All rules are important. It is also important for us to know the reasons rules are made so that we can better understand why it is important to honor the rules.*
3. Say: *In today's Gospel, we hear the Pharisees challenge the practice of Jesus' disciples that went against a rule that the Pharisees taught about washing hands and food utensils. Let's listen carefully to this reading, and then we'll talk more about what Jesus said to them about their rules.*
4. Invite one or more volunteers to read aloud today's Gospel, Mark 7:1-8,14-15,21-23.
5. Ask: *What did the Pharisees think that Jesus' disciples should be doing?* (washing their hands carefully) *This was a practice of the Pharisees and of some Jewish people. They washed their hands and purified food utensils to make them clean. They thought that by doing this they were making themselves holy.* Ask: *What did Jesus say was a better indication of a person's holiness than washing one's hands and dishes?* (the words and deeds he or she does)
6. Say: *Jesus taught that the Pharisees had forgotten the meaning behind their rules. They thought that they were making themselves holy by following the rules about making things clean. But Jesus taught that there was something more important than these actions. Jesus taught that our words and deeds toward others are what show us to be holy people. God wants us to do good things with our lives, such as share our possessions, think kind thoughts even about those who hurt us, and be truthful.*
7. Conclude in prayer together, asking God to help us live our lives in ways that show that our love for Jesus. Pray together the [Morning Prayer](#) or the [Act of Love](#).

## Grades 7-8

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## Gospel Reading

Mark 7:1-8,14-15,21-23

Jesus teaches that it is that which comes from our hearts that defiles us.

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### Making the Connection (Grades 7 and 8)

Young people know that there are many good things that they might choose to do. We can help them learn that these actions are holy when they express our total conversion to God.

### Materials Needed

- None

### Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Invite the young people to imagine that they are preparing a TV reality show that documents a day in the life of a religious or holy person. Ask the young people to prepare a list of actions that might be included in this TV program. List these things on the board.
2. Discuss the following questions: *Why do these particular actions offer evidence of a person's holiness? Do only people who are holy perform these actions? If others also do these same actions, how do we judge which actions show that a person is holy?* (Accept all reasonable answers.)
3. Say: *In today's Gospel, Jesus is asked a question about his disciples' failure to do something that the Pharisees believed offered evidence of holiness. Let's listen to this Gospel to see what Jesus teaches about holiness.*
4. Invite one or more volunteers to read aloud today's Gospel, Mark 7:1-8,14-15,21-23.
5. Ask: *What did the Pharisees think that Jesus' disciples ought to be doing?* (keeping the Jewish practice of washing their hands and saying prayers before meals) *As part of the religious practice of the Pharisees and of some Jewish people, they washed their hands, purified their food utensils and said prayers while they did this. Some people thought that*

*people who did these things were holier than people who didn't. Ask: What did Jesus say was a better indication of a person's holiness than washing one's hands and dishes? (the words and deeds he or she does)*

6. Say: *Jesus taught that the Pharisees who questioned him had forgotten the meaning behind the religious practices they observed and taught. They thought that they were making themselves holy by honoring these traditions about making things clean. But Jesus taught that there was something more important than these actions. Jesus taught that the words and attitudes behind our actions are what show us to be holy people. Our religious observances and all our actions should show our total love and obedience to God.*
7. Conclude in prayer together, asking God to help us become truly holy people, whose actions are expressions of our love and obedience to God. Pray together the [Morning Prayer](#) or the [Act of Love](#).

## Family

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### Gospel Reading

[Mark 7:1-8,14-15,21-23](#)

Jesus teaches that it is that which comes from our hearts that defiles us.

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### Family Connection

Children have learned the importance of following rules. Like the Pharisees in today's Gospel, they often bring to our attention the infractions of others. Even parents sometimes get caught off guard by their children's observations: "Why don't you have to go to bed at 8:00?" or "But I saw you eat a cupcake before breakfast once." Our rules for our children are not arbitrary. We establish and enforce family rules with the intention of helping our children grow to be healthy and mature adults. We foster this maturity when we also initiate conversations with our children

about the purposes behind family rules and teach them the essential values that rules help us observe.

As you gather as a family, list some of your most important family rules. Together, try to write a single, positive statement that captures the essential value behind your family rules. In today's Gospel, we hear Jesus criticize the Pharisees for making their rules about ritual purity equal to the commandments of God's Law. Read today's Gospel, Mark 7:1-8,14-15,21-23. When we remember the essential element behind our rules, we see that our rules help us be the good people that Jesus wants us to be. Conclude in prayer together that we may always honor God's Law in our words and deeds. Pray together today's psalm, Psalm 15.