

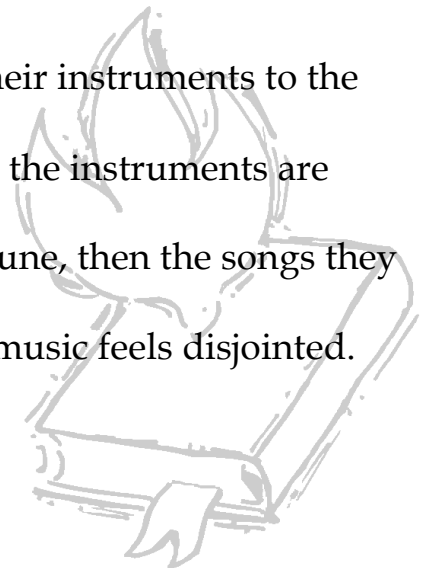
Homily
22nd Sunday OT - B

Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
August 28-29, 2021

Dt 4: 1-2, 6-8
Ps 15: 2-5
Jas 1: 17-18, 21b-22, 27
Mk 7: 1-8, 14-15, 21-23

There is something very calming for me whenever I listen to classical music. Whenever life gets a little stressful, I turn to this genre to ease my tensions and to listen to music that transcends time. I watch a concert on television or listen to the music in various ways and I become amazed at the way all the instrumentalists harmonize with each other and make the notes on the page flow seamlessly together.

There is a tradition that takes place prior to every concert that parallels today's readings wonderfully. Prior to the conductor's entrance into the symphony hall, the assistant conductor, usually sitting in the chair assumed by the first violin, plays the "A" note on their instrument. The rest of the orchestra, following cue, tunes their instruments to the "A" note of the first chair violin in order that all the instruments are tuned together as one. When an orchestra is in tune, then the songs they offer become pleasing to the ear; when not, the music feels disjointed.



In today's gospel reading, we find an instance where the heart was not in tune with the head, or in the case of the Church when the body was not in tune with the soul, where leaders of the Church went through the motions of the faith without comprehending the heart that underlies those actions. The Pharisees were so obsessed with the rituals of faith that they could not recognize the purpose of all life and the heart of their very existence itself.

In one version or another, all three of the parallel gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke tell this story of the ritual washing. Luke tells the story without much comment, Mark focuses more on the Pharisaic rules than the moral of the story and Matthew puts emphasis on the moral of the story itself. As Mark tells the story, the Jewish leaders of today's gospel very much paralleled the rules of ritual washing that were outlined in the Law of the Old Testament, most notably the Ten Commandments of our faith. They followed the letter of the law in the fourth chapter of Deuteronomy but they neglected to follow the sixth chapter: to love God with all their heart, their mind and soul (and Jesus' edition in Matthew's Gospel, to love one's neighbor as oneself). As our

Church teachers instruct us, the missing ingredient to these regulations was the ingredient of love, the gift that gives the rules purpose and makes sense of them.

For us in today's times, we often run into similar dilemmas. Often, we will go through the motions and pay lip service to our rituals without encountering the heart or meaning of the rituals themselves. When we lose focus as to the meaning of these rituals, we often discard them as useless or we go through them as if they have no meaning or focus.

Last week, I had an opportunity to learn about this particular subject in a visit with my university class to the Hindu Temple of Greater Chicago. I am teaching a "World Religions" course for my university students this year and as part of the course, we have been visiting various places of worship throughout the area. In the course of this semester, we will hear from those of the Muslim religion and will visit a Buddhist temple, the local Jewish synagogue, the Presbyterian Church and will come here at the border town parishes.

But at the Hindu temple in Lemont, the method of prayer in which the faithful engage themselves somewhat parallels the type of prayer life we Catholics aspire to live. Mother Church instructs us to understand the Hindu life - in its declaration *Nostra Aetata* ("in our time"), the bishops of the Second Vatican Council implored the Catholic faithful to engage in discussion with those of the Eastern Religions so as to find the common points of prayer and practice that are similar to our faith traditions. In that light, to use a Hindu term, I became very "enlightened" as to how the Hindu practices of the faith very much parallel today's gospel reading.

In their practices of the faith, the Hindus believe in a life of "Karma" which focuses on the type of reaction or consequence that takes place as a result of their actions. In short, the further the Hindu believer removes the self from desire and the ignorance of the human self that causes one to act badly, the more focused one becomes on a type of spiritual knowledge that the Hindu's call the "dharma." As a result, the faithful Hindu is able to see the soul of God from within themselves.

For a faithful Hindu, this type of self-realization and intense focus takes a great number of years and many lifetimes that have to reincarnate so that the next life may improve on the one that preceded it. A faithful Catholic would not understand God's revelation to us in that particular way (as Jesus Christ once and for all removed the stain of Original Sin that separate us from God, a cleansing of sin that we achieve through baptism). However, our understanding of removing sin from within our lives so that we may comprehend God more clearly very much parallels that of the Hindu life. And as a faithful Hindu engages in various types of yoga and inward reflection to achieve this state of *Nirvana* or perfection, so a Catholic would also seek a relationship with God in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament through adoration, contemplation and meditation.

If we understand the concepts of this intense type of introspection and prayer, then we understand the significant problem that exists with the Pharisees in today's gospel. The problem that the Pharisees experienced some 2000 years ago is the same problem that often distracts us today. How many times do human traditions and customs

distract us from the true purpose of our life? How many times have we replaced our devotion to God with empty human activities that seem pleasurable in the now but are like a foundation of sand for the spiritual house we are building?

Unless our purpose of life within our souls find meaning, then our externals of life appear as if we are just “going through the motions” of living without purpose or love, and we lose the harmony that unites our bodies and souls together. When we forget about the divine purpose that speaks deep within us, we lose the reason for life itself. And even when we engage in the Christian rituals, sometimes our hearts and souls are not in tune with our bodies and we recite the prayers as if they have no meaning whatsoever. And like a spouse whose actions of love do not parallel the words of love, then we as the bride of Christ often live a hollow relationship with the groom that died on the cross to save our souls from death. But when we become in tune with God, when we all choose to respond together to the same message of God that all of us receive, then we, with all our unique talents and abilities serve as

instruments of an orchestra who play together a work of music known as the Christian life.

In a Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue that took place a few years ago, the final document that came forth from these discussions reinforced this same point. In this dialogue, both the Evangelical Lutherans and Roman Catholics stated that faith is achieved through baptism and the effects of this baptism regenerate our souls to be that like Christ. The dialogue stated that if our souls are changed to be like Christ then, as a result, our actions and good works become our response to the life that has been changed. To love God is to serve God and this is seen time and time again in our scripture readings like the one we read today. Through this dialogue, two faith traditions touch the heart of God together in recognizing the source of all goodness. And like the faithful of the Jewish religion, the Hindu religion, the Lutheran religion and certainly Catholic tradition, our response that those around us experience becomes a reflection of the holy life that exists within us.

So the basic question is whether our souls are in tune with our bodies, if our hearts are in tune with our actions. Maybe this would be a

good time to reflect on the manner in which we intensely allow God to speak to us from within our hearts and souls. Perhaps this might be a good time to model the Hindu way of life by pulling away from the desires of life in order to focus on the divine tradition that wishes to lead us and guide us. Like the members of an orchestra become in tune with the notes of the first chair violin, perhaps this might be a good opportunity for all of us to become in tune with our God that plays these notes of love from within us, who plays these notes of love with the faithful of this community and who calls us to play this song of salvation for the benefit of those around us.

Let us sing together, pray together, live out these rituals together. Most importantly, let us realize why we live this faith, so that we can reflect and model the life of Christ that speaks within us and to be like Christ is the best response that we can offer to the call from within. Let's share that response with the people that we meet. This is our prayer.