

St Pius-St Anthony 22nd Sunday Ordinary Time Year B2nd

It seems strange that it even needs saying, but after hearing today's gospel, it needs to be said first that 'Yes, Jesus is for good hygiene-Yes, wash your hands'. And we mistake this whole exchange if we side with the Pharisees' attack charge on Jesus of it being a matter of handwashing. Of course, Jesus and the disciples covered the base of cleanliness, because they had just undergone a huge food service operation of feeding over five thousand people. So, we misunderstand what is going on in the gospel if we approach it from the Pharisees' angle about 'washing things'. The Pharisees were saying 'We honor Moses and the law He gave telling us to do this.' But Jesus honors Moses too, and is quick to point out how the Pharisees miss Moses' point in the law. The Pharisees look for things to attack Jesus about, while Jesus looks for things/ways to serve more people, save more people, care for more people. That is not what the Pharisees are concerned with. they want pots and pans cleansed, not hearts cleansed. I bet we have experiences like this in life too. Working together physically, doesn't automatically mean 'you're truly working together'. Pharisees and Jesus both claim honoring Moses, yet they are about much different work. Again, working together physically doesn't mean you're about the same motives

To show how easily we humans can get derailed from each other even about the same physical work, I'll share my experience of washing dishes. I'm not saying any of us boys liked it growing up, but a common job for us after dinner or before (depending on how many pots/ pans involved in cooking) was that mom would assign us the dishwashing job, one of us washed and the other dried dishes! But that doesn't mean we were really working together. Each worker could cause big problems for the other. For example, the washer could drag the whole operation on so long, irritating the other as the dryer couldn't dry until the dish was set in the rack. Often that meant telling the washer, 'Stop looking out the window, get on with it', or then the washer might say, 'the water cooled, I need to drain and add more hot water' meanwhile the dryer says, 'Come on now, breakfast is in a couple of hours'. Or then as the dryer would wait a second to let a little air drying happen to keep the towel from getting so saturated, the washer could keep pouring water out of newly washed things over the others already dried a little, wetting everything all over again each time. but such meanness wasn't only given by the washer, the dryer could gum things up by picking up a skillet pan and calling for a judgement, 'Mom, look at this, there is still burnt food on this one, and greasy film on it, he needs to wash

this over!” this could go on and on. Thank goodness we lived in a day, when there weren’t those sink-top hose sprayers! But also, maybe it is giving a little family secret away, but the coveted job was drying, because you wanted to be really familiar with the tea-towel drawer because that doubled as mom’s hiding place for bags of little candy bars from the store. But I offer that experience of dishwashing to show that while dishes may have been cleaned in the end, that did not mean we brothers were any better cleansed in our conduct toward each other just for washing dishes together. It takes more than that. One’s heart had to be involved-cooperating for the good of other people too. And that is the Pharisees’ problem. They didn’t make the connection between God’s Law and loving/caring for other people more. For example, Jesus tells them to love God above all, and to love their neighbor as God loves their neighbor, and they respond today by saying, “God taught us through Moses the proper way to wash hands, to rub inside fingers, keep water flowing, and ensure that you dry in open air.” They have missed Moses’ and Jesus’ point about God’s Law being given to make our human hearts more pure, not just cleaner hands. Of course, Jesus wants good hygiene in his followers, but the Pharisees attack is saying more about their ‘obsessive concern with law’s details to justify their compulsive control over others and their self-importance & superiority. Their corrupting obsession as **handwashing police** fed their self-righteousness. If I stay hung up on how I am washing my hands then I don’t have to deal with helping my neighbor and love him/her as God wants me to. The words of the reading itself from Mark indicate their problem (they are selfishly obsessing over their own righteousness instead of being concerned for their neighbor. Notice how Mark describes it: (7:3-4), Pharisees, ‘do not eat without **carefully** (read that ‘obsessively) washing their hands.... And there are **many** other things that they have traditionally observed, the purification of cups **and** jugs **and** kettles **and** beds” (Like Mark, is trying to tell us, ‘I could go on an endless list-but you got my point). The Pharisees are good at avoiding what religion is really after-social responsibility, properly moral, respectful, caring relations conducted between persons and God, then we understand how Pharisees always seem to get Jesus wrong. In John 5:2-9., they witness Jesus heal a poor, crippled despondent, man helplessly laid out in front of him in the temple area, and instead of marveling with gratitude, celebrating what God can do, the Pharisees respond “This teacher isn’t holy, He offends us-he works on the Sabbath?’ That says it all. They may know how to wash hands, but they know nothing of pure intentions. They can open up faucets,

but not open up their hearts. It turns out that they are showing greater concern for pots, cups, jugs, kettles, beds, than they are toward human beings. So Jesus tells them, "You may be good at washing dishes, but how about cleansing your hearts of sins (Wash your heart before you wash your hands). Jesus has a list of purity items, not hands, cups, kettles, jugs, beds. No, Jesus' concern is (Mk 7:21-22) about cleansing evil thoughts, greed, unchastity, theft, murder, adultery, malice, deceit, licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, folly. As if he is saying, 'Take care purifying those sins, then come tell me about washing hands.'" The Pharisees don't notice when Jesus gives new life to people by healing blindness, lameness, leprosy or even curing death, but they do notice and jump Him about His disciples not wringing their hands completely dry, before eating. Jesus' answer to them: Start with the heart. Is it cleansed, is it washed, is it concerned with how best to carefully consider how my neighbor is doing, and how I am doing with them? More than cups, kettles, beds and hands, Jesus wants us to first to cleanse our hearts, and then the hands will follow.