

22nd Ordinary Sunday
August 29, 2021
“Serving God from Without and Within”

Dt 4:1...8

Jas 1:17...27

Mk 7:1-21

My Brothers and Sisters in the Lord –

What are we really like in our deepest selves? Who is each of us as an individual human person? We have a name – and we live in a particular place – But what is our real and authentic personality and identity?

These are truly tough questions, if we take them seriously – Because so many in our society and culture are not who they appear to be externally. And the worst of it is that they have no idea that they are not who they think they are! Ours is a culture of externals. We are supposed to look a certain way – wear the “right” clothes – fit in – be accepted by everyone – and not “rock the boat”!

To discover the kind of person we really are, takes time and introspection. We should ask ourselves how we would behave in some truly difficult situations. “What if we were homeless? What if we were someone with PTSD? What if we were among the world’s wretched poor, starving or diseased? How would we behave in any situation of great danger, stress, or temptation wherein no one would know what we did – failed to do – or, would ever find out?”

All the scriptures for today can help us to ponder these questions and help us with self-knowledge. They can also help us to discover the kind of person that God created us to be and wants us to become.

In the reading from Deuteronomy, the Chosen People were about to enter the Promised Land after 40 years in the desert. Moses places before them the fundamental choice that we all have to make. Will they keep all the commandments of the Lord God and live in the way He wants them to live? If they do, they will be blessed as individuals and as a nation. Moreover, other nations will admire them. They will marvel at the wisdom of the people as they live in harmony and justice with one another. And they will wonder about the Lord God Himself – who is so close to them!

Unfortunately, as we know, by the time of Jesus, many of the Chosen People had lost their way. They had strayed from the Commandments and statutes the Lord had given them. Most of their leaders were living as hypocrites – they did everything with a “religious” overtone – but their hearts were far from God! They did not know God, because they did not really know themselves! Moreover, they had extended their priestly rituals to the common folk – who could not observe what God never asked of them in the first place!

Consequently, Jesus excoriates them for their lives of sham. Quoting Isaiah, he says: “This people honor me with their lips – but their hearts are far from me!”

Then, Jesus teaches that it is what is in our hearts that is the measure of who and what we really are. He also recites a list that includes many things that can be a stumbling block or an occasion of sin for us – no matter who we are!

In the New Testament reading, St. James has words of encouragement – But he also has words that challenge us. He teaches that everything good that we have and enjoy comes from God. We are blessed in so many ways with life itself, as well as a share in the divine life of God through Jesus. But we must be faithful. We must truly live the Gospel that Jesus has given us. We must translate the words of Jesus into action in our lives.

This means reaching out to those who are helpless and in need, especially those whom we might want to blame for their own problems – like the homeless around us! It also means divorcing ourselves from all in the culture that is godless – from everything that influences us to be less than God created us to be.

Brothers and Sisters, becoming all that God wants us to be is a life-long task. It starts with being honest with ourselves. “Are we internally what we are externally? Or are we hypocrites? Do we pretend to be other than we are? Are we afraid to be honest with ourselves? What can we do each day to become a more authentically human disciple of Jesus?” These are more “tough” questions.

So, let us pray for God’s grace – Let us pray that God helps us to be open to whatever needs to be changed in our hearts and lives!

Amen.

August 29, 2021

Msgr. Russell G. Terra