

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

Inner Vigilance Fifth Week in Ordinary Time Wednesday, February 12, 2014
8:15 AM 1 Kgs 10:1-10; **Mk 7:14-23** (Consciously choosing what kind of being one will be and become.)

“All these evils come from within and they defile.”

It is hard for us to put ourselves in the shoes of the disciples, but here we see Jesus mentoring them. He teaches the crowds in parables. Then he **pulls the disciples aside** and discusses things on a deeper level with them. **He is always trying to encourage them to understand things.** He wants the crowds to understand too, but he does less encouraging.

This issue is really **the issue of kosher laws.** The Jewish people felt very deeply that kosher laws were from God; well, therefore they must be correct. Some kosher laws are rooted in the written Law, but most of them are not. Most of them are a matter of oral tradition, passing down from generation to generation among the learned, schools of rabbis and so on. So when Jesus says, “A man is not defiled by what goes into him,” he is saying all this kosher stuff is for the birds, not in so many words, but that’s really what he meant.

Now that is rather hard to take if that’s what you believe and you have been brought up believing is God’s will. So **what really is required to follow Jesus’ thinking is a willingness to change one’s basic convictions and the formation of one’s conscience as it has been up to then.** And that’s quite an order when you think about it—that’s quite an order. Yet even so, even though he is expecting a lot, Jesus expresses a certain amount of **impatience with his disciples for being so slow to do it.** But then we get to **his real point, that we are defiled by what comes out of us.** What a way of turning things around! What comes out of us, what is inside of us, is really what we need to pay attention to, not what is outside of us. There is something about the Law and there is something about ritual that can keep us outside, keep us away from the **inner reality of our hearts, but that’s where Jesus**

always wants to go. What's coming out of the person: **thoughts, feelings, intentions; this is the inner life; this is what Jesus wants to focus on.**

He himself was tempted, as we are, by every kind of thing. The point is that **we have to deal with temptation as temptation and dismiss the temptations from our presence so that they do not come out in words or actions.** This means **we have to have an inner vigilance.** That's the whole point of this whole teaching. We need an inner vigilance. We just can't say whatever pops into our head to say. We can't just express any kind of feeling whatsoever. Sometimes people say things like, "Well, feelings aren't right or wrong; they are just feelings." Well, that's not exactly true. **Feelings can be hurtful when expressed.** Feelings can be damaging and harmful, like revenge or envy or some forms of sadness and melancholy. They can eat away at a person. They can bring a person down. **So insofar as we are capable we have to take charge of this.**

Some people can't; they need help. God's graces help. We have the help of medicine. We have the help of therapy, but **we have to do something about it, not just let it be.** So this is about **leading a conscious life, an examined life, a life of awareness,** and not just being what ever one is—**consciously choosing what kind of being one will be and become.**