

Ritual and Inner Reality Twenty-eighth Week in Ordinary Time Tuesday, October 17, 2017 8:15 AM Rom 1:16-25; **Lk 11:37-41** St. Ignatius of Antioch, bishop and martyr (The inner reality can exist totally apart from the ritual, but the ritual can exist apart from the inner reality. The ideal is the two come together.)

“But as to what is within, give alms, and behold, everything will be clean for you.”

Now some people on hearing this story might be a little bit embarrassed because it seems as if here there’s a nice social occasion, **Jesus** is invited to dinner and then he becomes very upset about something apparently small. But is it small? **What he was upset at was the sense of amazement or the astonishment of the Pharisee that Jesus disregarded the customary ablutions.** Well, in my family you didn’t disregard those customary ablutions and get away with it. You had to leave the table, go wash your hands.

But this is something else. It’s not really about germs; **it’s about ritual.** And Jesus felt very free to disregard ritual, and you see it many times in many stories in the New Testament. The point he made being that **ritual is all well and good, but it is something that exists outside of us, would that it indicated something going on inside of us, the cleansing of the inner cup.** And that’s something we really need to think about. For example, Christian life is marked at the beginning with the sign of **Baptism**, and **we can observe the rite**, but we cannot observe what goes on inside a person, especially as a person grows up having been baptized into Christ, **but does each child really welcome Christ?** We talk about the innocence of children, but there’s the other side of it, the willfulness of children. And do they understand what they are doing? Well, no, probably not, not in detail, but they are nonetheless **freely either associating with Christ, accepting his grace or not**, rejecting, moving away. It’s free even though the consequences are not comprehended.

And this is the world we are living in, where **God has always been addressing us**, always, so to speak, coming to dinner in our homes, **and yet how much external attention do we give, and how much internal attention do we give?** Rites all wonderful, but they point to an inner reality; this is the teaching of St. Thomas. The inner reality, which he happened to call *sacramentum tantum*, **that inner reality that can exist totally apart from the ritual, but the ritual can exist apart from the inner reality. The ideal is the two come together and we really celebrate God's grace; we celebrate and welcome God's life in us.** That's what this is about. And, yes, I think it is probably a legitimate thing to be angry about, that people don't get this, people whose whole lives are centered on some kind of religious teaching, and yet don't get this.