

Inside Out Religion

James 1:17-18, 21b-22, 27
Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

August 30, 2015

22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B

Father Dave Mercer, Pastor
St. Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Church
San José, California

Jesus said: Hear me, all of you, and understand. Nothing that enters one from outside can defile that person; but the things that come out from within are what defile.

[Mark 7:14-15]

Not long ago, I'm driving across town when I miss a turn, so I decide to make a u-turn at the next light. I pull into the turning lane only to see a sign saying, "No U-turn." I quickly look about to see if there's a cop nearby. Not seeing one, I decide to make the forbidden u-turn. When the light turns green, I start the turn, only to chicken out and follow the rule, making a simple left turn instead. I then find my way back to the main road, turn right, and drive back to the street I first wanted to turn on.

In today's reading from Mark's Gospel, Jesus seems to be a rule-breaker – someone living outside the lines. People object that he and his followers don't wash their hands before they eat. They object for a purely religious reason, but Jesus transforms their objection into a moment to teach about real religion – *true* religion. Jesus basically says that, although what we do on the outside might be important, it needs to flow from what's *inside* of us. It ought to express what's in our hearts. In other words, real religion (pure, true religion) is an *inside-out* religion.

In today's second reading, the Apostle James wants Christians to possess a pure, true religion. He tells us that when we allow the word of God to take root in our lives, that same word stands to change you and me. True religion leads us to care for the people who most need our help. For those early Christians, it meant caring for the orphans and the widows in their need. That's an *inside-out* religion.

Jesus Christ calls us to practice an *inside-out religion*, a religion rooted in the most important rule of all. Later in Mark's Gospel, Jesus tells us that the greatest commandment is to love God with all of your *heart, soul, and mind*. He then tells us: *love your neighbor as yourself*.¹

Let's keep in mind that *God is love*. Thus, God's message for you and me is to learn how to be a person who loves, a person who seeks what is good for the other person simply for that other person's sake. When you love, God's love changes that other person. When you love, God's love changes you. When you love, you become most like God.

Teenagers, here's what this can mean for you. There's little wonder that Jesus, who is the most complete expression of God's love, wants to have a relationship with you. He wants to transform your life with the love of God. Love is the basis, the foundation, the heart of

every command and rule he gives you. And so, to be in a relationship with Jesus (and that's what he wants of you) is to love God with *heart, soul, and mind* and *to love your neighbor*.

I grew up playing baseball, and I never had a coach who told us just to go out onto the field, to do whatever we want, and to ignore the rules. Instead, coaches teach us the right way to throw the ball, to hit the ball, and to run the bases. Coaches make sure we know the rules and that we follow the rules. Playing by the rules makes the game fun and enjoyable. Without the rules, it wouldn't be baseball – it would be chaos. The rules help us to play the game well.

Jesus wants to have a relationship with you. His most important rule (the greatest commandment) is to love with all you can bring to it. Our parish mission statement puts it in these words:

*Inspired by the Holy Spirit, we follow Jesus
by making disciples, serving others, and changing the world.*

I ask you to do one simple thing this week – to take one simple step to make that mission come alive. Think of one person who needs to know they're loved. Pray that God's love will transform that person. Then, write him or her a short note – four or five sentences max. Here are a few suggestions:

- Compliment him or her about something.
- State you miss seeing him or her around.
- Tell that person of your love.
- Let that person know you're praying for him or her.

And to help you take this simple step, you'll find some note cards at the church doors. As you leave, take one as our gift to you. Add your words, then send it as your gift to that person. (And you'll find the envelopes already have a postage stamp.)

Allow your religion to be an *inside out religion*. You'll find that God's love will begin to change that person.

And, you'll find that God's love will change your life, too.

¹ Mark 12:28-31.