

Fr Rudy's Reflections  
The Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time  
September 1, 2024

### **It's What's Inside That Counts**

My Brothers and Sisters in the Risen Lord,

Imagine a person meticulously adhering to all societal norms—holding the door for others, dressing appropriately for every occasion, and saying the right things at the right times. Yet, behind closed doors, this same person harbors resentment, envy, and hatred. This scenario illustrates a vital truth: *It is what is inside that counts.*

In today's Gospel of Mark, Jesus addresses the Pharisees and scribes who criticize his disciples for not following traditional purification rituals. Jesus responds by pointing out their hypocrisy: "You leave the commandment of God and hold fast the traditions of men"—this powerful statement reminds us that human traditions, while beneficial, should never supersede God's law. Human traditions do play a significant role in our lives, providing structure and a sense of identity. When these traditions, however, add to or subtract from God's law, they lose their intended purpose. We cannot claim divine authority for man-made laws.

St. James, in today's Epistle, calls us to be "doers of the word and not hearers only." This admonition urges us to live out our faith actively, embodying God's love and grace in our actions. It is not enough to merely listen to the teachings; we must implement them in our daily lives, showing compassion, mercy, and justice to those around us. The Pharisees of Jesus's day, much like some of us today, prioritize external adherence to traditions and rituals over the essence of God's commandments. This misplaced focus can lead to judgment and exclusion, fostering an environment where outward appearances are valued over inner transformation. Such attitudes create unspoken expectations of others and can alienate those who fail to meet our superficial standards.

Jesus's challenge to the Pharisees remains relevant: where is your love and grace for others? All the worship traditions mean nothing if they are accompanied by judgment and a lack of compassion. True worship is rooted in a heart transformed by God's love, not merely in external compliance. As Pope Francis wisely noted, "With these words, Jesus wants to caution us too, today, against the belief that outward observance of the law is enough to make us good Christians. It is not the external things that make us holy or unholy, but the heart which expresses our intentions, our choices, and the will to do all for the love of God. The boundary between good and evil does not pass outside of us, but rather within us."

In reflecting on today's Gospel, let us remember that true righteousness stems from within. Let us strive to align our hearts with God's commandments, allowing his love and grace to flow through us. May we be doers of the word, living out our faith with integrity and compassion, and may our traditions always point us toward the deeper truths of God's law.

Yours in Christ,

Fr. Rudy