

August 04, 2020

St. John Vianney

Tuesday of the 18th Week

Jer 30:1-2, 12-15, 18-22

Mt 15: 1-2, 10-14

I'm sure I don't have to explain to anyone these days about the importance of washing hands. In the Israel of Jesus' time washing hands was considered every bit as important as it is to us today, but for a different reason. Jesus' contemporaries washed their hands before eating for spiritual reasons—to purify themselves before receiving from the Lord's bounty. The Jews didn't want to defile themselves by eating the Lord's gift of food with impure hands.

The problem that Jesus has with the Pharisees and scribes is that they were more interested in making a show of their piety than they were in actually being pious. So Jesus calls them out as hypocrites.

Jesus teaches that purity comes from within—from the heart. Purity has nothing at all to do with what you put into your mouth. It has everything to do with what comes out of your mouth, and what comes out of your mouth comes from the heart. “Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God.”

I think this gospel today invites us to hearken back to our baptisms, an event that most of us probably have no memory of. Of course the central event in the baptism ceremony is the pouring of water three times over the person being baptized while the minister of the baptism says: “I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”. This is the essence of baptism. The pouring of the water symbolizes complete immersion under water, the way baptisms used to be done. When you go under water for a long time, what happens? You die. So the baptismal immersion symbolizes dying to the influences

of this world and then when the person being baptized rises out of the water it symbolizes rising to new life, just like Jesus rose to new life at His resurrection. When we're baptized we die to our old selves and then rise to a new life with Jesus.

In the baptism ceremony, after the pouring of the water, there are other less known rituals. One of these rituals is when the minister prays over the ears and the lips of the person being baptized, asking God to open the ears to hear His word and to open the lips to proclaim His word.

As a result of each of our baptisms, we have this obligation to proclaim the word of God by what we say and by how we live our lives. We took on this obligation at baptism, at the very

moment when our hearts were probably as pure as they will ever be. The gospel today is a reminder of this obligation to strive to keep our hearts clean and pure so that we can worthily share the word of God with everyone we meet not only by what comes out of our mouths, but by how we live our lives. By so doing, may we one day see God. Blessed are the clean of heart.

Today the Church celebrates St John Vianney, the patron saint of parish priests. His was renowned not for his intellect. He barely made it through the seminary. He was such a poor student that after his ordination his bishop assigned him to a small rural village—population 250. How much damage could he possibly do in such a small town? St John Vianney was not known as a gifted preacher. They say his homilies were simple and unsophisticated. Yet, because of his heart, people flocked to St John's small village by train from miles away to experience St John's heart in the confessional. St John Vianney would often sit in his confessional 10, 12, even 18 hours a day to share his heart. Blessed are the clean of heart. St John Vianney, pray for us. Please ask the Lord to help us keep our hearts pure and clean so that we, too, may keep our baptismal promise to share the Good News worthily and mightily.