

Scripture Reading

A reading from the Gospel according to Matthew (*Matthew 15:10-11, 16-20*)

Jesus called the crowd to Him and said, "Listen and understand. What goes into someone's mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them." "Are you still so dull?" Jesus asked them. "Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. For out of the heart come evil thoughts - murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what defile a person; but eating with unwashed hands does not defile them." The Gospel of the Lord. R. Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ.

Reflection – May our heart be led by our faith

We must control our heart as it is the seat of sin. Jesus teaches us that impurity cannot enter us from outside but it is what that comes out of our heart that can make us impure. Therefore, we must be master over our heart, and never let the selfish passion of our heart give direction to our lives. We either control our heart in loving subjection to God's truth or be controlled by a heart that pursues its own narrow self-interest, giving rise to impurity that will harm our soul. A heart pursuing its own disorderly self-interest is a treacherous master. Its fruits are lack of peace, dissatisfaction and emptiness.

When a soul has no strong foundation in faith, he/she is usually driven by feelings. The Enemy of our salvation knows this and can manipulate our feelings without us being the wiser. Thus, our feelings of compassion and sentimentality can be manipulated to present to us sinful acts to be acceptable under the banners of "freedom", "choice", "human right", "alternative lifestyle", etc.. When a soul is led by feelings he/she is not concerned with the will of God but driven solely by human feelings of that moment. Jesus has given us ample warning when He admonished St Peter: *Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."* (*Matthew 16:23*). Strong feelings or passions that are humanly very difficult to control are feelings of hurt, woundedness, bitterness, injustice, anger, jealousy, hatred, envy, lust, unforgiveness. Once they are not ejected from our heart Satan will lever upon them for the furtherance of his dark kingdom. We have to be careful not to let our feelings be manipulated to over-ride God's will in any circumstances. Feelings are just feelings whilst God's will is eternal.

Our worst enemy is the hidden pride in our heart. We fail to recognize pride in our own heart because of our hard-heartedness due to our sinfulness. Jesus goes to great lengths to teach us humility. His whole life on earth is a great testament to the humility and love of Jesus. *Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls* (*Matthew 11:29*). His condescension to come to our world in the flesh requires us to lower and abase ourselves to the same degree in a true response to the loving action of Jesus. True humility heals the human heart of all emotional and spiritual ills and makes true all the virtues that it possesses. Humility is not merely external behavior. It is more an attitude of the heart that assents and holds firm to the eternal truth that one is nothing in the eyes of God Who is the Author of all good. Thus, true humility ascribes all good solely to God alone. Hidden pride in our heart seeks to put ourselves above others, make us want to look good in the eyes of others, look for affirmation from others, to be appreciated, included, consulted, valued, approved, admired, esteemed, honoured.

Unholy fear is an unsavoury fruit of disordered pride. Unholy fear seeks inordinately to avoid situations like humiliation, rebukes, rejection, ridicule, misunderstanding, and any circumstances that put one in bad light in the eyes of others. Unholy fear can paralyze a soul from doing the right thing. Scripture has some examples on this. Fear of the crowds led Pontius Pilate to condemn Jesus even though he knew Jesus was innocent. Fear of the opinion of his courtiers led King Herod to follow through his rash promise to the daughter of Herodias to give her whatever she asked for even though he knew it was not right. Pilate and King Herod both had hearts weakened by pride which gives power to unholy fear.

Conversation with Jesus: Precious Lord, I surrender my poor heart to You. Make my heart holy by purifying it of all self love. Self love engenders pride and unholy fear. Teach me self-forgetfulness so that my focus will be on You and all that You love. Free my heart from all disorderly love of and attachment to other people or things. The degree in which I invest my love in such things is the degree of my attachment to them. Unless the sole desire of my heart is its Maker, its Highest Good, my soul will remain in restlessness. Make my heart simple, pure, and ordered to love what You love. Mary, Mother of Salvation, pray for me. Thank You, Jesus. Praise You, Jesus. www.twohearts.hk