

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY - B

First of all let me make it clear from the very beginning that Jesus is not telling us that we don't have to wash our hands before we eat!

Since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic we have certainly been reminded again and again about the importance of washing and sanitizing our hands to prevent the spread of germs.

As a matter of fact, many of the "purity laws" in the Old Testament were meant not only to set Israel apart from their neighbors as a people special to the Lord ...

... but they also promoted the physical health of the nation as they travelled to the Promised Land.

The problem that arises in today's Gospel is that over the centuries the Scribes and the Pharisees had added so many layers of human traditions to God's law that they were prone to seeing such practices as a "litmus test" of holiness.

In contrast, Jesus insists that true holiness depends upon what is in our heart.

It's as if he is saying, "You can wash your hands all you want, but if your mind is filled with evil thoughts you're still a long way from being holy."

Jesus calls the Scribes and Pharisees who act in this way "hypocrites," which literally means "to hide behind a mask."

They wore the mask of ritual purity, but underneath they were polluted by the sins of pride and being judgmental.

When it came to the heart of God's Law, they fell into the trap described by St. James in today's second reading:

Instead of being doers of the word, they were hearers only, deluding themselves.

Of course, we have to admit that at times we can give in to the same temptation.

Putting our faith into practice is a challenge we are called to take up every day.

St. James reminds us that true religion leads us to concrete acts of mercy, charity, and justice.

As followers of Jesus we strive to keep ourselves unstained by the worldly values of self-centeredness and greed.

Generosity is a hallmark of Christian discipleship and our parish has always responded faithfully whenever there is a special need.

This weekend we are being asked to come to the aid of our brothers and sisters in Haiti, especially our sister Diocese of Forte Liberte.

As we prepare to enjoy our parish picnic this afternoon, let us be mindful of those who are struggling for the basic necessities because of the recent earthquake and tropical storms.

God, from whom all good gifts come, will multiply our giving and enrich it by his grace.