

Text: Mark 7:1–13

Theme: Defiled Hands

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

My dear beloved flock, the text for our meditation this morning is the Holy Gospel according to St. Mark the Seventh chapter verses one through thirteen.

Boys and Girls how are you doing today? Excellent! What do you do when your hands are dirty from playing outside or working on the car? You clean them! You go to the sink and wash your hands until the mud and dirt is washed off. How do you know if they are clean? Who's to tell us when our hands are truly clean? Scientists, doctors, teachers, parents, employers? Sight, smell, taste? There are actually those who argue we've so sanitized our world, including our hands, that our children are growing up *less* healthy than we did, more susceptible to resistant microbes. All of this pales to unimportance, though, when we compare it to the question of a clean heart. How do we have a clean heart? Ponder that as we hear the rest of the sermon. You may go back to your seats and those who love you.

The contrast between Jesus' reception at the end of Mark 6 and his encounter with the Pharisees and scribes in our passage to open chapter 7 is remarkable. The contagious excitement about a Jesus who heals all who come to him is replaced with a concern about the ritual cleanness of his disciples' hands. "Now when the Pharisees gathered to him, with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem, they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. . . . And the Pharisees and

the scribes asked him, ‘Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?’” (vv 1–2, 5). The Pharisees view sin, not as an inward illness but outward, something you could catch from someone else by coming into contact with them. Thus, they washed their hands, cups, bowls, and tables frequently, especially if they came into contact with non-Jewish people.

If you had the opportunity for a private audience *with Jesus*, would you argue about the proper way to wash up before a meal? It may even be that this was not a matter of the disciples not washing their hands at all, but of not washing their hands thoroughly enough to meet the Pharisees’ standard. Jesus’ opponents seem to have completely lost sight of what really matters before God. The way they ask their question suggests that the root of the problem is that they’ve begun to put human concerns before and above what’s important in God’s eyes. Our initial sympathy with the Pharisees’ concern over clean hands at the table goes right down the drain when we begin to see the real problem in all its seriousness, not only unclean hands but unclean hearts.

When I was a child wanting to pass “bath-time inspection,” I quickly learned that my mother was not going to check the easy-to-reach obvious places like my hands or my tummy. If I wanted to be declared “clean,” I had to make sure I washed behind my ears and between my toes. I had to be completely clean to pass inspection.

Would you pass inspection if our Lord was the one looking? If we are being honest with ourselves, our hands are far from clean. They are stained with sin and it’s bloodshed. We use them to break the Law of God. We flip the bird at those we do not like or who we think have done us wrong. We lift up our hands in anger

when people talk back to us. We steal our neighbors' possessions, thinking that if we have more things we will be happy. We abuse our bodies, breaking the Fifth and Sixth Commandments. Like Lady McBeth after she committed murder, we are haunted by the unclean things our hands have done. We cry, out damn spot! And wash again and again, only to have the stain of sin remain. It remains because defiled hands come from a defiled heart.

How do we get an undefiled heart? We get an undefiled heart because of Jesus' undefiled hands. He kept the commands of God, even when they supposedly violated the traditions of men. He held the Fourth Commandment in higher status than the sinful way of saying that something was Corban, dedicated to God, in order to not support your parents. His own *undefiled* hands will be hooked with nails to a beam of wood to suffer and die at the hands of the powerful few. He will endure a horrible human tradition of condemnation and execution, so that "the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles" (v. 4) will seem like so much small potatoes compared to the washing of rebirth and regeneration that cleanses a defiled heart, found in the waters of Holy Baptism. Because of Jesus' death and resurrection, we have more than just clean hands, we have a heart that is washed clean in the blood of the Lamb.

Because we have a clean heart, our hands can be clean as well. We use them, not to hurt or harm our neighbor, or our own bodies, but use them for his good and wellbeing. We use them to collect items for Echoz and Wee Disciples. For the support of the Church and it's mission, to put food on the table and a roof over our families heads that they may be provided for, as well as much more.

Defiled hands? Now they are undefiled because of the Undefiled One who died and rose, and gives Himself in this

blessed meal that you may be cleansed of all of your sins, and live with Him forever and ever.

May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard and keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.