

Text: Mark 7:14-23

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, *Amen*.

Jesus says, **“Hear me, all of you, and understand.”** He wants to clear up a misunderstanding about defilement. He speaks to the crowd with Him. But He doesn’t want anyone in the Church to suffer the same misunderstanding. He says, **“There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him.”**

To be defiled is to be impure in body and soul before the holy God. God’s glorious holiness is undefiled, incorruptible, imperishable. God shines in the light of unapproachable holiness. Around Him the angel hosts sing “Holy! Holy! Holy!” and in His temple the saints cry “Glory!” No stain, no spot, no blemish of body or soul can endure the presence of that holy perfection. But we need to be pure. To be pure, we need to have a pure conscience before God and so be pure in soul. No blot of sin can show up to accuse us, to condemn us, when we stand in God’s presence. We need to have a body free from the ravages of death—sickness, disease, evil lusts. If we are defiled, if we have a guilty conscience and a body of sin, then we will not abide the day of His coming when He appeareth like a refiner’s fire and as fuller’s soap.

The Pharisees of Jesus’ day had a profound misunderstanding about defilement. They did not heed the warning given in our Old Testament Scripture from Deuteronomy: **“You shall not add to the word I command you.”** They added to the word of God. The Law forbade the eating of various kinds of animals. The Pharisees made up more rules about eating and not eating, how to wash what you ate, how to wash the hands before you ate, when to eat, when to not eat—who, how, when, where, what, why, and on and on. They thought that refraining from eating certain things or washing certain things they ate kept them undefiled and pure, and if pure, then prepared to stand before God’s holy presence on the day of His coming.

Today, many think the same. They might not be Pharisees, but theirs is a pharisaical religion. Vegan, vegetarian, paleo, carnivore, Atkinson—there are plenty of folks out there whose every meal is their religion. People feel morally pure when holding to a rigorous diet that refrains from touching certain things in preference to special foods and makes them superior to the less discerning. Think how many people make a lifestyle for themselves built around diet to feel pure.

Jesus dismisses such pursuits as futile. The Pharisees did not understand. Neither do folks in our day understand this teaching Jesus gives: what enters into us does not defile us. What comes out defiles us.

Jesus disciples didn't quite catch His meaning and so they ask Him later exactly what He meant. Jesus says, **"Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach?"** (At this point I need to read from the King James. The modern translations try to be too clever with their parenthetical comment) **and goeth out into the draught, thus purging all meats?"** Jesus tells us that food goes in and food goes out. The body expels digested food into the draught, the sewer, and purges itself. Food leaves no lasting defilement in our body because it doesn't touch our heart, our inmost parts, our soul.

Whether full of whole grains and non-gmos or of microplastics and pesticides, the contents of our stomachs are not the source of our impurity. But our hearts are the source of our defilement before God. Food cannot touch the heart, therefore food cannot defile. Jesus corrects this misunderstanding and redirects us. He says what comes into a man does not defile him. But **"What comes out of a man is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a man."**

Sin is the source of defilement before God. And sin is in our hearts. That's our problem. We are sinners and so impure. No matter what we do, what we eat or don't eat, all the terrible vices Jesus lists will pour out of our hearts again and again and again. Why is this? Because we are all born corrupted and defiled in sin. Adam and Eve sinned and fell. They pass on their corruption to all their descendants. We call this teaching of the bible original sin. St Paul talks about our sinful condition in Romans chapter five. He writes, **"Through one man sin entered the world, and death spread to all men because all sinned."** Here Paul argues from effect back to cause. Where there's smoke there's fire. Where there's death, there's sin. The punishment, the consequence, for sin is death. That's what God said in the Garden of Eden. Everyone dies. Therefore everyone is a sinner. God is not unjust. He does not punish unless deserved. Everyone dies. Therefore, everyone is clearly a sinner, someone who is defiled before God, who has a guilty conscience that sullies his soul and is therefore under God's judgement.

Friends, don't forget that this includes babies. In Psalm 51, David says, "In sin did my mother conceive." He's not saying that she had a fling. He's saying that she was sinful flesh and so he from his conception on was sinful flesh too. He puts his birth as a sinner forward as the reason for his own terrible sin of adultery with Batsheba that he laments throughout the psalm. David acknowledges that he sinned as an adult because he was born corrupted by sin.

Babies can die because they are sinners. They might not be murdering and fornicating and slandering...yet. We judge by appearance and think—impossible that something so

cute and precious should stand defiled before God!" If children look too cute to be sinners, then by the same logic the most beautiful woman is the nicest and the strongest man the noblest. Appearances deceive us but they did not deceive God, who, as Solomon says, "Weighs the heart." The lion cub looks cute but in six months he will bite and tear without distinction. Eve was delighted by the birth of her firstborn, Cain, and said, "I have gotten a man, the LORD!" She saw no sinner. But her joy faded to sorrow when God asked that terrible question of her child, "Where is thy brother Abel?"

From our conception on, we are sinners. We all stand defiled before God from within. Defiled due to sin, original sin. It is a deep corruption of the heart that births all manner of evils. In Genesis chapter 6, Moses tells us that, "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Apart from Christ, our hearts too only work evil continually. Fallen man cannot do good. That is what Jesus teaches us. We are weighed and found wanting. Judgement is upon us as a flood, as a fire, to purify the creation we have defiled. In the days of Noah God punished the unbelieving world with a flood. He will punish a final time and purify with fire what is defiled.

But friends, we rejoice that there is a cleansing from without prepared for us, a washing that will purify us within, a washing offered to everyone, whether fresh from the womb or on one's deathbed.

We can do nothing to cleanse ourselves. But Christ, the one who says "**What comes out a man defiles a man**" offers us cleansing from without. He is the one man who is pure of heart. David prophesies of Jesus in Psalm 40, where the Christ to come says, "Behold, I come, In the Scroll of the Book it is written of me; I delight to do your will, O my God, and Your law is within my heart." The Law is kept by Jesus perfectly. He loves God with heart, mind, and soul, and His neighbor as Himself. He is pure within. He lives before God in the innocence of a clean, undefiled conscience. He can stand before God and live. This is what He came in the flesh to do.

It is this man, this pure, innocent, undefiled one, who says "I am gentle and lowly in heart." He sees your defilement and shoulders it. The innocent one takes on your impurity. Your impurity is placed upon Him with the nail blows. Your iniquities are cast away from you and buried in the tomb. As St Paul says, "God made Him who knew no sin to be sin, that we might become the righteousness of God." He rises free from your filth, pure before God that you might stand righteous before God too, with a pure, undefiled conscience.

This purity from the defilement of sin is ours in baptism. St Peter says that Baptism is not just some bath where you wash away dirt, but it is the "Answer of a good conscience to God." Baptism gives us a clean conscience that answers "Not guilty!" before God

because baptism really is for the remission of sins. Baptism purifies the heart, it cleanses the consciences, it gives the Holy Spirit who makes our hearts His temple. Baptism also seals our bodies of corruption for incorruption. The Holy Spirit is given in baptism. He sets our flesh apart for that day when He will raise us up in pure, immortal, incorruptible bodies that can stand before God.

Baptism is a gift for all, from the youngest newborn to oldest man on his deathbed. In baptism we are drowned and rise again. We are crucified with Christ and rise with Him free from sin and pure before God.

The baptized stand pure before God on account of Christ. God sees you as He sees Jesus. This is what we believe and trust even as we continue to fight against sin our lives. Every day we confess in faith that we are baptized and so Christ's righteousness is ours. We are pure in heart because made pure in heart, and so we will stand on that day. We will see God and live.

Our purity in baptism and the blessed hope that we will see God and not face His judgement should make our lives joyful. You live free from sin. You live free from a guilty conscience because you are pure. So don't misunderstand like the Pharisees ancient and modern. What comes in does not defile a man. What comes out defiles a man. And you are pure. So, as St Paul says in Titus chapter 1, "To the pure (you! A baptized Christian!) all things are pure."

You might choose to eat certain things and abstain from certain things to try to meet health goals. But don't let anyone take you captive with rules about doing and not doing, about eating this and not eating that, about animal rights, fair trade, and solar panels. What comes from without does not defile.

No diet, no prohibition, no man-made program can bind our consciences. In Romans chapter 14, St Paul reminds us that "The kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit." Righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit are the gifts given in baptism, where we are cleansed from without. In baptism we receive the righteousness of Christ, and so we have a peaceful conscience, and joy inexpressible because we are free and full of the Holy Spirit. Jesus says, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." We are pure in heart. So we live now pure and await in hope that day when shall see God and live.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, *Amen.*