

Bridging the Gap

22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time year B

Mark 7:1-8,14-15, 21-23

I just love when Jesus gets feisty (—well, except maybe, with me!).
One could envision, in this incident, in this encounter,
Jesus responding in professorial fashion: removing his glasses, and saying,
**“Well, my dear friends, if we consider the true nature of religion,
and the true nature of human personhood,
the primacy of the human spirit over behavioral considerations is such
that the human intention is what first gives value to human action.”**

All of which is true!

But, instead, Jesus responds,

“Well did Isaiah prophesy about you hypocrites.”

Jesus slams them!

This could almost be on ESPN!

Or, so it seems...

Actually, feel the love.

Jesus is hard but *loving*.

Jesus is reaching into their hearts and minds.

Jesus does them a huge favor (whether or not they realize it!).

Jesus does them the huge favor of unveiling their incoherence,
of unveiling their hypocrisy.

Hypocrisy is the distance or incongruence
between what lips proclaim and hearts claim.

Hypocrisy is the distance or incongruence
between the outside and the inside—*in that order*.

Hypocrisy is behavior that tries to proclaim a goodness
that finds little correspondence in the heart.

Hypocrisy thus engages the illusion of moral superiority.

However, are there not *two* types of moral distance or incongruence?

- that which Jesus unveils here—largely a question of *hypocrisy*
- that which torments Saint Paul, when he says that he does not do the good that he wants to do—largely a question of *weakness* (Rom 7)

There is a *huge* difference.

Jesus accuses the Pharisees and scribes of impeccable “religious” practice,
of “correct” moral behavior, in which **“their hearts are far”**,

and, in the process, of having

- taught as doctrine human precepts,
- disregarded God's commandment—to love—
and clinging to human precepts, *their* precepts.

[Recall other words of Saint Paul, **“If I do not have love, I am nothing.”**]

The Pharisees and scribes presume that they are fine,
for their focus is their behavior.

Saint Paul knows that he is not fine, for his focus is his heart.

He is tormented by actions betraying the intentions of his heart,
i.e. the good he wants to do.

Does this not sound familiar?

How often do we say to ourselves,

“Why did I do that?”

“Why did I say that?”

“Where did that come from?”

We may sometime be hypocrites—if we presume that we are fine.

We surely always struggle like Saint Paul.

Why?

Because we are all born with the consequences of Original Sin.

What does this mean?

The Church has come to believe/understand that our first parents “blew” it.

Adam and Eve, symbols of our first parents in humanity,
opted to go their own way.

Their choice disrupted the harmony of human life,

and we suffer the consequences of their choice,

because we are all one big happy family (!).

This translates into a propensity to selfishness.

Does this not sound familiar?

We are all basically good.

We are all capable of good—and beautiful, things.

But there is a struggle at times to do them—like Saint Paul.

My guess is that some of these things mentioned by Jesus hit home.

We all struggle to love.

We are all clinging—in one way or another—to the Love Boat.

And it is not smooth sailing.

What Jesus actually does in this gospel
is underscore the centrality of our hearts.

Jesus underscores the importance of *intention*
—which the Pharisees and scribes were missing.

You may have heard the expression,

“The road to hell is paved with good intentions.”

I strongly beg to differ.

“The road to *heaven* is paved with good intentions.”

What we intend matters.

What we intend orients our hearts.

What we intend keeps our hearts fixed on Jesus

in the midst of these various struggles,
allowing Jesus to love and work in us
in the midst of these various struggles.

On our end, intending is thus

- precisely how we grow
- precisely how we are transfigured

In other words, if we keep intending—which is an expression of hope,
we will be changed.

There will always be some measure of painful distance
between what we want to do and what we actually do.

But, by virtue of a renewed intention, we bridge the gap.

And our actions gradually do change, increasingly do express love.

It is our intention that opens us to the Holy Spirit.

Thus, in the midst of the various struggles, love can have the last word.

How hopeful!

How simple it is to reconnect with God—asking forgiveness, if need be.

How hopeful!

Let us not waste a moment, yielding to despair.

Despair is about us.

Despair is not about the One who is faithfully present, bridging the gap,
until He be all in all, until everything be transfigured by love.

Let us hope.