

Tuesday, 15 October 2019

Lk 11:37-41

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One who stays away from sinners, humble and the poor stays away from the mercy of God and from God himself.

Jesus continues to highlight what is central to our relationship with God. We see a Pharisee inviting Jesus to have a meal with him. The purpose behind this invitation can be either to get any opportunity to humiliate him or to listen closely to Jesus and learn from him. The Pharisee was surprised to see that Jesus did not wash the hands before dinner. The Pharisees were teachers of the law and so they considered the practice of law is as important for holiness before God. It means those who don't practice they were considered as sinners. They were too much concentrating on the external observance of the law. They sought salvation by following the rules and in the process they became ultra-critical of anyone who didn't follow the rules. But the rules themselves were available only to the wealthy people like the Pharisee class. Now if we think of practicing the ritualistic washing at the time of Jesus one should be wealthy to afford plenty water n that too clean water. There should be servants to carry out this ritual. So it was not affordable for the poor people and they were not able to follow this rule. So the Pharisees looked down upon the poor. They judged them by their appearance not what was in their hearts. Jesus was well aware of this situation in the society and that's what prompted Jesus to skip the ritualistic washing. Jesus was trying to identify with the poor of the society as he himself was a poor carpenter.

When the Pharisees asked him about the failure to have the ritual washing, he criticized them for their too much emphasis on the external observances and appearance.

What Jesus is really emphasising here is the inner spirit and motivation. Once that is right, everything else will be taken care of. A person's virtue is not to be judged by his performance or non-performance of an external rite. Jesus is focussed on what is inside a person, in the human heart. The Pharisee, in sharp contrast, is primarily concerned with external observance of rules and regulations, such as the ritual washing before a meal. What is my focus?

During the initial months of my mission experience in Ghana, my brother priests were insisting me that I should be washing my hands after greeting people with a shake hand, also after counting the money. For six months I was in a village parish assisting a Ghanaian priest. We had 18 substations for that parish. One day when I went to a substation for mass, I had to remain in one of the parishioners' house so that the next day morning I would say the mass there and come back to the priest house. After the mass and greeting people I left the church and went to the house where they allocated a room for me. There was an old lady and her three children staying there. I asked the old lady some water to wash my hands after greeting the people. Since the lady noticed about my cleanliness she exclaimed during the meal that she was afraid if I would feel uncomfortable looking at the unclean vessels and

tables. But she said it was a great honour for her family to welcome me to their house as she considers me as Jesus himself. In fact it's funny to say she indirectly forced me to become aware of myself and my too much emphasis on cleanliness.

The cleanliness of my heart is far more important than external cleanliness. Let us not judge others by their external appearance but express our solidarity with the poor like Jesus. That's why Jesus is speaking about the almsgiving. The giving of alms in a genuine spirit of wishing to share with the needy is an authentic sign of inner goodness and integrity. Jesus once again places love and inner goodness above the commands of law.

May this Divine Liturgy help us to open our inner eyes to look into our hearts and through our association with the poor make ourselves righteous. Amen

Published by

CMI General Department of Evangelization and Pastoral Ministry