

Lesson 4

Proper 17

The Holy Gospel: Mark 7:14–23

Jesus had just interacted with Pharisees and scribes who had come from Jerusalem to keep an eye on Him. When they criticized some of His disciples for eating with hands they had not ceremonially washed, Jesus applied to them Isaiah’s judgment of the people of his day: “This people honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me; in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.”

Jesus was referring to their meticulous—but perfunctory—observance of the 613 detailed rules they had developed as a “fence” to surround and protect the Law, and to assure their obedience to its commands. They expected the people to imitate their religiosity and live by their rules, and they criticized Him for not having His disciples do so.

Jesus told them that in their concern for the details of their tradition, they were actually at times rejecting the commandments of God. He pointed them specifically to their use of *Corban*—vowing to make something a gift to God—to exempt themselves from responsibility to give financial aid to their parents in their need, even though God’s own commandment is “Honor your father and your mother” (Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16).

Because the Pharisees made a public display of their religiosity, and were respected and imitated by the people, Jesus “called the people to Him again and said to them, ‘Hear Me, all of you, and understand.’”

50. What was it that Jesus wanted them to understand about their relating to their covenant Lord? Why didn’t Jesus avoid conflict by just going along with the legalistic religiosity of the Pharisees?

51. What, according to Jesus, is the real source of defilement in people’s lives? Why did His disciples have difficulty understanding Jesus’ “parable,” or *mashal*? Was Jesus here abrogating the Levitical Law, which did forbid eating certain foods as “unclean” for Jews?

52. Jesus cited a long list of sins that come from within, from the sinful heart, that make people unclean. What do you notice about the kinds of sins that Jesus listed?

53. What does Jesus' statement that all of these sins come "out of the heart of man" say about our becoming clean before God? (See Psalm 51:6, 10–12.)

54. Why is the "spirit of Pharisaism" an ever-present temptation also for Christians? (See Matthew 16:5–12.)

The Old Testament Lesson: Deuteronomy 4:1–2, 6–9

Deuteronomy means "Second Law," but it is more than just a repetition of laws. As Moses' farewell encouragement to Israel, its thrust is a development of the theology of the *Torah*, which means "instruction." It repeats laws, yes—but it also expounds on the relationship with the Lord of the covenant that was to motivate and enable Israel's obedience. Moses' farewell addresses were spoken as the forty years of wanderings in the wilderness were coming to an end. A new generation had replaced the ones who had not trusted the Lord to give them the Promised Land. Moses reminded them of Yahweh's covenant and its laws and encouraged them to walk in faith and obedience as they entered Canaan to settle in the homeland the Lord had promised to Abraham and his descendants.

Take time to scan the laws in Deuteronomy—chapters 5, 14, and 21—and note that they have different thrusts. Those in chapter 5 are moral laws; in chapter 14, ceremonial laws; in 21, civil laws.

55. How did each of these kinds of laws provide important instruction for the life of Israel as God's covenant people? Why did Moses carefully tell the people neither to add to nor take from the commandments of the Lord? What, according to Moses, would Israel's obedience to God's laws show their neighbor nations, and what would be their reaction?

56. What principle does this suggest for our living according to our Lord's instruction as His disciples? (See Matthew 5:13–16; 1 Peter 2:12; 3:15–16.)

57. Why did Moses give the added encouragement to "take care, and keep your soul diligently"? Why did he remind them to "make them known to your children and your children's children"?

58. How does this Old Testament Lesson tie in with today's Holy Gospel?