



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

ANGELUS

*Saint Peter's Square
Sunday, 30 August 2015*

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

The Gospel for this Sunday concerns a dispute between Jesus and several Pharisees and scribes. The discussion is about the value of the “tradition of the elders” (Mk 7:3) which Jesus, quoting the Prophet Isaiah, defines as the “precepts of men” (v. 7) which must never take precedence over the “commandment of God” (v. 8). The ancient rules in question consisted not only in the precepts God revealed to Moses, but in a series of norms that the Mosaic Law indicated. The interlocutors observed these norms in an extremely scrupulous manner and presented them as the expression of authentic religiosity. Therefore, they rebuked Jesus and his disciples for transgressing them, specifically the norms regarding the external purification of the body (cf. v. 5). Jesus’ response has the force of a prophetic pronouncement: “You leave the commandment of God”, he says, “and hold fast the tradition of men” (v. 8). These are words which fill us with admiration for our Teacher: we sense that in him there is truth and that his wisdom frees us from prejudice.

Pay heed! With these words, Jesus wants to caution us too, today, against the belief that outward observance of the law is enough to make us good Christians. Dangerous as it was then for the Pharisees, so too is it for us to consider ourselves acceptable or, even worse, better than others simply for observing the rules, customs, even though we do not love our neighbour, we are hard of heart, we are arrogant and proud. Literal observance of the precepts is a fruitless exercise which does not change the heart and turn into practical behaviour: opening oneself to meet God and his Word in prayer, seeking justice and peace, taking care of the poor, the weak, the downtrodden. We all know, in our communities, in our parishes, in our neighbourhoods, how much harm and scandal is done to the Church by those people who say they are deeply Catholic and often go to Church, but who then neglect their family in daily life, speak badly of others and so on. This is

what Jesus condemns because this is a counter-witness to Christianity.

After his exhortation, Jesus focuses attention on a deeper aspect and states: “there is nothing outside a man which by going into him can defile him; but the things which come out of a man are what defile him” (v. 15). In this way he emphasizes the primacy of interiority, that is, the primacy of the “heart”: it is not the external things that make us holy or unholy, but the heart which expresses our intentions, our choices and the will to do all for the love of God. External behaviour is the result of what we decide in the heart, and not the contrary: with a change in external behaviour, but not a change of heart, we are not true Christians. The boundary between good and evil does not pass outside of us, but rather within us. We could ask ourselves: where is my heart? Jesus said: “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also”. What is my treasure? Is it Jesus, is it his teaching? If so, then the heart is good. Or is my treasure something else? Thus it is a heart which needs purification and conversion. Without a purified heart, one cannot have truly clean hands and lips which speak sincere words of love — it is all duplicitous, a double life — lips which speak words of mercy, of forgiveness: only a sincere and purified heart can do this

Let us ask the Lord, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, to give us a pure heart, free of all hypocrisy. This is the word that Jesus uses for the Pharisees: “hypocrites”, because they say one thing and do another. A heart free from all hypocrisy, thus we will be able to live according to the spirit of the law and accomplish its aim, which is love.

After the Angelus:

Dear brothers and sisters, yesterday, in Harissa, Lebanon, the Syro-Catholic Bishop Flavien Mikhaïel Melki, a martyr, was proclaimed Blessed. In the context of the terrible persecution of Christians he was a tireless defender of the rights of his people, exhorting all to remain steadfast in faith. Today too, dear brothers and sisters, in the Middle East and in other parts of the world, Christians are being persecuted. There are more martyrs today than in the first centuries. May the beatification of this Martyr Bishop instil in them comfort, courage and hope, but may it also be an incentive to legislators and governments that religious freedom be assured everywhere. I ask the international community to do something so as to put an end to the acts of violence and oppression.

Sadly, also in recent days many migrants have lost their lives in their dreadful voyages. For all of these brothers and sisters, I pray and invite prayer. In particular, I join Cardinal Schönborn — who is present here today — and the entire Church of Austria in prayer for the 71 victims, including four children, found in a lorry on the motorway between Budapest and Vienna. Let us entrust each one of them to the mercy of God; and let us ask him to help us to cooperate effectively to prevent these crimes, which offend the entire human family. Let us pray in silence for all migrants who are suffering and for those who have lost their lives.

I greet the pilgrims from Italy and from so many parts of the world, especially the Scouts from Lisbon and the faithful from Zara, Croatia. I greet the faithful from Verona and Bagnolo di Nogarole; the youth from the Diocese of Vicenza, those from Rovato and those from San Galdino Parish in Milan; the children from Salzano and from Arconate.

I wish everyone a happy Sunday. Please, do not forget to pray for me. Enjoy your lunch!

Arrivederci!