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22nd SUNDAY of the Year, B + September 2, 2018  
Deuteronomy 4:1-9; James 1:17-27; Mark 7:1-8, 14-23

### On the Scriptures of the Sunday

After five Sundays listening to a section of John's Gospel about the Eucharistic meal, coming from the miracle of the loaves, we return now to the Gospel of Mark. About the middle of the Gospel. A controversy has arisen with the religious teachers of Jesus' era, the clerical specialists you might say, who have come from Jerusalem to see and understand what he is like. They take issue with what they see as serious neglect of religious law and tradition about washing before meals. It is a charge leveled against his disciples. This becomes a teaching situation for everybody.

As a context for this story we begin with a section of Moses' final sermon in the Book of Deuteronomy, where he declares how the law of the Lord is what can hold the tribe together, and be a ground for their covenant with God.

And from the New Testament we hear today, and all through September an early Christian teaching known as the Letter of James. It is addressed to Jewish converts throughout the Mediterranean world, how the law of Christ must be shown by living and acting in compassion.

### HOMILY: 22nd Sunday "Creating Church"

I attended the parish meeting last Wednesday night, a listening time for us to respond to the wave of information from Pennsylvania about seventy years of child abuse at the hands of clergy. You know the story and the details and the hundreds of instances that happened. I bring it up partly because in 2003 these same scriptures were before us and we were all taking in the revelations of abuse by way of the Boston Globe. Later on it came through the film *Spotlight*. This Gospel, about the contrast between external image of holiness, and the deeper matter of the human heart, breaks this open again.

So I went to the meeting last Wednesday like going back to old pain,  
reluctant for sure: but also I needed the voice  
of the people who make church real for me, who assemble here.  
I had one main prayer. I was asking God  
“Help me to hear what you want me to hear.”

Many who were there live and work more closely with children than I do.  
And that’s what I heard, to keep my heart open always to the young,  
those who suffered through this in silence and whose lives are scarred so badly.  
Even when they are now adults looking back. To feel how that might be.  
I begin to live and pray about this through the heart of a child.  
And to remember the young children around here,  
who know all that happened that shakes faith, you might say,  
but on the other hand, things happen sometimes  
that simply demand faith, that we don’t forget how to trust each other.

And that’s the theme that mattered to me most, keeping community.  
Some of our parishioners cried out,  
“Why do I stay, why do I remain Catholic? I’m asked this again now, this time.  
My women friends, my Jewish friends. They ask.”

But in exchanges around the room that night,  
one answer came up and felt important. It was simple and direct.  
One person put it this way: “We stay for the sake of those who have been harmed,  
not to lose faith with them, not to desert them and their lives now.”  
Those in Pittsburg or Philadelphia, the harmed in Boston or Cincinnati,  
who do not deserved to be excluded from the table here.  
Or excluded from our remembering them, our slow grief.  
And so it is important for us to keep our place at the table  
and bring what we go through as a part of the offering of Christ with us.  
That communion of depth and reality, what our faith brings about.  
“I don’t want to give that up,” a person said.  
My faith is strong. My love is strong. My religious leaders disappoint me,  
and so I stand with the people who share my vision and grief,  
the people who make church real and deep for me.  
As I take the bread of life. Real Presence.

So at the Wednesday meeting I was there in the Real Presence.  
It is what happens among people.

The Church of the people awakens to its heart, as the heart comes to feel itself.  
My own anger, I begin to see, can be an escape, male bravado, a futile numbness.  
I need help beyond it, toward my deeper heart, not to be numb.

So I come to call on God's motherhood, and pay attention to how she awakens us  
together in these pews, and in our homes. Jesus too, feeding us.  
So I'm thinking how Jesus had an eye for the young, all the time.  
His own disciples were young. Young adults.  
Sons and daughters of the people, brothers and sisters, women who followed.  
When the old leadership in this Gospel accuses them of impropriety  
because they failed in the washing rituals before eating,  
Jesus went right to the issue underneath. "I am not here to save  
the best image of Judaic practice, or your reputation for that.  
I have no sympathy for your need to stand for an elite way of life.  
I invite you to a deeper place, the realm of the heart,  
where pain exists, desperate need, and possibility:  
I want to touch that."

The human heart, how to be true to this place.  
Priority number one is to love well.  
To love one another, and find your way in that to love God,  
that's where you will be clean and whole.

But what pulls us apart also comes up from the heart, so learn it well:  
name the dark movements of evil thoughts, unchastity, greed, malice, deceit, envy,  
saving face, protecting the clerical caste, our deep ignorance about  
the demands of life and goodness, for the young, the least among us.

I came upon an essay by a woman named Erin White, writing how  
"Church is What We Create with Each other." That's what she values about  
her little church, how there is an open place there for people to speak up.  
She began to know that Sunday announcements, the stories in the bulletin,  
are important ways Church is created for her. All that goes on,  
pancake breakfasts and immigration meetings. Calling up the children.  
Church is about these things always and deeply: as Erin says,  
"it is about showing up for one another, to feel how surely  
the blessings and burdens of being human are not ours to bear alone."

Being alive these years at Bellarmine has helped my own heart.  
Because I'm with people who want to be open to life.  
Open to all of it, open to what the wounded remember.  
And at the same time, open to our hymns of praise,  
and the baptism of new children, and home building in eastern Kentucky. Supporting our family from  
Salvador.  
Writing letters for bread for the world,  
and to write letters to our bishops calling for transparent justice.  
We have voices, we have time, we have heart.  
We all belong.

As the letter of James encourages us today,  
"religion that is pure and undefiled before God is this:  
to care for orphans and widows in their affliction,  
and to keep oneself unstained by the world."

May it be so.