



The Sunday Liturgy Commentary
The 22nd Sunday of Ordinary Time – 2nd September 2018

Lectionary readings: Dt 4 1-2,6-8; Ps. 15:2-3, 3-4, 4-5; Jas 1:17-18, 21b-22, 27; Mk 7:1-8,14-15, 21-23

Theme: *The heart of observing the law, is observing the law of the heart*

This Sunday’s set of readings gives us an interesting connection from the first reading up until the Gospel. In the first reading, Deuteronomy, we see Moses’ exhortation to the children of Israel to “hear the statutes and decrees. . .and to observe them, do not add nor subtract from it. . . to observe it carefully. . .” In the Psalms, we read and pray about “the one who does justice will live in the presence of the Lord” by describing a life lived in doing acts of justice and righteousness. In the letter of James, he exhorts “be doers of the word and not hearers only.” Finally in the Gospel we read Jesus’s teaching about observing the law on ritual purity. What connection can we see?

The key to the connection might be the word: observing/doing. Obviously, since it consistently reappears in all the readings we have this Sunday. We can see that they emphasize not only “hearing the law” but “observing it.” What does it mean for us to observe it then? Is it not enough to “do” what the law for one to say that she/he “observes” the law? It is interesting that in the Gospel, Jesus shifts the attention to the congruence of what is done outwardly and the inward disposition which drives the outward action. It may be misleading to say that Jesus puts more importance on the internal disposition and does away with the external observance of the law/commandments of God. On the contrary, we may consider that Jesus teaches observance of the law as important but that goes to the depths of what it means to really observe the law.

The deal-breaker? The heart. He says, “Nothing that enters one from the outside can defile that person; but the things that come out from within are what defile.” Reading further, “It is what comes out of a person that defiles. For it is from within, from the human heart that evil intentions come.” Pope Francis quotes the final verse from the Gospel in his book *On Self-Accusation: Corruption and Sin*. Observance is not limited in the external acts of piety but in the total is the matter of the heart. Externalities may be important, but we should also watch over the fragmentation of our observance of the law which can emerge from a heart that is immersed and infected by evil. Jesus in the Gospel reminds us that while observing the law is good, we should keep watch over our heart from which either authentic obedience or hypocrisy ensues. Observing the law is not just doing what the law says but observing it with all our heart. At the heart of observing the law, is observing the law of the heart. Justice is demanded of us not only in our external acts but must come from the heart. Simply, goodness and justices involves the totality of our very person: the integrity of our actions in sync with our internal dispositions.

We may read this controversy in the Gospel of Mark not so much about Jesus going against the Pharisee’s interpretation of the law but about Jesus confronting our superficiality and even hypocrisy when it comes to our observance of the law. In the world today, especially in the rise of populist leaders in many countries, we see violence unleashed, the widespread neglect and non-tolerance, even propositions of condoning death and destruction, justified by and done in the name of “observance of the law.” This Sunday’s readings challenge us not only to pay lip service to the law but, as the first reading from Deuteronomy mentions, to observe and to keep the law authentically. Inspired by this, we hear the echo of the very Spirit which inspires Bat Kol Institute to proclaim: “We will hear, and we will do!” (Dt. 5:27)

For Reflection and Discussion: [1] **What were the moments when we have become superficial in our observance of the law?** [2] **Where is our heart? What comes from our hearts? Do we use our external acts of piety to cover up for the ‘evil’ which arises from our hearts?**

Bibliography: Amy Jill-Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., “Mark 7,” in *The Jewish Annotated New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Jorge Mario Bergoglio, *Way of Humility Corruption and Sin on Self Accusation*.

This week’s teaching commentary was prepared by
John Paul A. Bolano, MA, Philippines, Bat Kol 2017
Email address: jbolano@ateneo.edu
[Copyright © 2018]

.....
PLEASE NOTE: *The weekly Gospel commentaries represent the research and creative thought of their authors, and are meant to stimulate deeper thinking about the meaning of the Sunday Scriptures. While they draw upon the study methods and sources employed by the Bat Kol Institute, the views and conclusions expressed in these commentaries are solely those of their authors, and do not necessarily represent the views of Bat Kol. Questions, comments and feedback are always welcome*
.....

Bat Kol Institute for Jewish Studies, Jerusalem
1983-2018
“Christians Studying the Bible within its Jewish milieu, using Jewish Sources.”
Mail to: gill@batkol.info Website: www.batkol.info