

Sermon- 9/2/2018 - Labor Day, Text- Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

## Tradition/ Tradition

Grace and peace to you and from our Lord Jesus Christ. Well, here we are - Labor Day, 2018. Where did the summer go? That's what we usually ask when we hit this day. It's a day filled with traditions. For many of us, it speaks of the tradition of our last travel day - last weekend away before the crazy schedule starts. Airline travel - 17 million of us take to the friendly skies - or not so friendly when you encounter the lines. Driving to get away - websites abound on what time of day one should leave to avoid the road congestion. Our somewhat empty pews speaks to this tradition. For those of us who remain, we have the tradition of one last picnic, one last barbecue, or closing up the cottage, putting the boats in storage, or getting the toys away. The traditions abound. We are a people with traditions.

I just returned from the East coast. That's a tradition for me. Pretty much go at the same time each year. When I hit the Big Apple, one of the first things I do is to have a "slice". A piece of NY pizza from my favorite joint on 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue in Brooklyn. Another tradition is to go to Saratoga Race Track. My tradition is to sit right next to the paddock where the horses are being saddled. Up close and personal. I have the tradition of wearing a straw hat, nice sport coat, an attempt to blend in with the beautiful people.

The idea of tradition even creeps into our churches. We pretty much arrive at the same time, sit in the same pews and nod off at the exact moment in the homily. Tradition/ Tradition.

In 1964, a play opened on Broadway. It was 'Fiddler on the Roof', and no doubt you had the joy of seeing it. The play is based on tradition, specifically the traditions of the Jewish people. Tevye speaks from the roof of the house. "Because of our traditions, we've kept our balance for many, many years. Here in Anatevka we have traditions for everything... how to eat, how to sleep, even, how to wear clothes. For instance, we always keep our heads covered and always wear a little prayer shawl. This shows our constant devotion of God. You may ask, how did this tradition start? I'll tell you- I don't know. But it's a tradition..."

Because of our traditions, everyone knows who he is and what God expects him to do.

Tradition/ Tradition/Tradition  
(Tevye and Papas)  
Who day and night  
Must scramble for a living  
Feed the wife and children—- Pastor sings  
Say his daily prayers  
And who has the right  
As Master of the house  
To have the final word at home?  
The papa, the papas...Tradition  
Tradition/Tradition/ Tradition”

Which leads me to the Gospel lesson for today. You knew I would get to it eventually.

Jesus again is confronted by the Pharisees, actually criticized by the Pharisees, and the issue has to do with the tradition of hand washing. Seems trivial, but to a Pharisee it was not. We have to deal with the Sitz in Leben. That’s a German phrase which I learned in Seminary many moons ago. It means the situation in time. Or, the social, ethnic, and cultural setting of the text. In other words, what’s happening here.

The tradition of the Pharisees was that every observant Jew should practice a thing called Netilat Yadayim. A ceremonial way to wash ones hands before eating. Had to use a certain type of pitcher, wash each hand 2-3 times, hold the arm in a certain way and recite a Jewish Prayer. This tradition was not found in the written law but in the oral tradition which was added much later. For the Pharisee, following the rules was what was important. It didn’t really matter if this was practically impossible for the common folk. What did matter is that you followed the rules, or the tradition.

Jesus, in our text, completely socks to to them and talks about lip service. He reminds the listeners and us that God’s will and commandments take precedence over human tradition. And, that following those traditions does not necessarily

mean that one is being faithful to God. Then Jesus goes on to make the radical statement (radical to Jewish ears at the time) that food -even that which is eaten with unwashed hands -cannot make a person unclean. Instead, it is those things that come out of people – those things that people choose to do -which create a gulf between them and God.

The point here is that Jesus wants us to pay attention to our hearts. If our hearts are broken, damaged, or filled with that which is harmful, then what comes out of us is potentially evil. Doesn't matter how often, or in what manner you wash your hands. It's what inside of us that matters.

So what do you think? Can we focus on what's inside us? Can we ask God to fill us with his spirit to have a "healthy heart"?

“Create In me a clean heart, O God  
And renew a right spirit within me.  
Cast me not away from your presence  
And take not your Holy Spirit from me.  
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,  
And uphold me with your free Spirit.

Can we do it? Of course we can, with God's help. It's not what goes in, it's what comes out that matters. Let's pray that what comes out is good stuff.

Amen- Let it be so.