

22nd Sunday of the Year

We have beautiful Scriptures to reflect on today....and I'd to begin with you picturing this image:

Two houses stand across from each other on the same street:

The 1st house looks right out of the pages of "*Better Homes and Gardens*...."

.....beautifully designed and detailed.

.....the yard is professionally landscaped with a manicured lawn,

.....elegant brocade and silk window appointments,

.....rooms filled with fine furniture and antiques,

.....expensive, late-model cars in the driveway.....

The 2nd house is far from being a dump)but hardly the stuff of decorator magazines....

.....bicycles, ball games, and small swimming pools pot-mark the lawn,

.....the driveway is strewn with skates, toys and sports equipment of all kinds,

.....a durable van and sensible car - - both with lots of miles and dents, are parked in the driveway.

.....the house is decorated in a style that can most charitably be described as "eclectic" - - large, stuffed sofas and chairs in the family room,)bunk beds in the boys' room,)a small desk in the girl's room that belonged to Mom when she was a girl.

.....keeping everything clean and neat is a challenge...

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In the 1st house, it is always quiet....

...although members of one family, the mother and father and children who live there are like ships passing in the night.

Aside from the elegant parties for clients, the dining room table is never used....

....the father is away on business,

....the mother involved in a number of activities and projects.

....son and daughter have their own schedules, friends and activities.

....four separate lives exist in the first house.

But there is always something going on in the 2nd house.

....school work, games, a video, projects of all kinds light up every room.

....the menu is pretty simple and fast....but everyone pitches in to help....and everyone is at his or her place every night at the well-worn dinner table.

While cold formality chills the interior of the 1st house...

...love, compassion, forgiveness, and support transform the 2nd house into a real home.

One author writes:

“Real estate ads offer houses for sale...not homes....a house is a garment easily put off or on....casually bought or sold...a home is skin.

Merely change houses and you will be disoriented; change a home and you bleed...When the shell you live in has

taken on the savor of your love....then your house is a home."

In today's Gospel, Jesus challenges us to see beyond externals and facades to "inside" our souls and hearts to the place where God dwells....

-where love is born,
-where compassion reigns, where peace lives.

This Gospel recounts a controversy that Mark's first Christian readers understood all too well.

A contentious debate raged in the early Church/as to whether or not Christians should continue to observe the practices of Judaism.....

And Mark recalls a similar debate/that took place within the Judaism of Jesus' time/when Jesus challenged the scribes' insistence that faithfulness to ceremonial washings/and other rituals constitutes complete faithfulness to the will of God.

In Mark's Gospel, Jesus scandalizes his hearers by proclaiming:

- ..."nothing that enters a person from outside can make that person impure....
-that which come out of the person....and only that... constitutes impurity."

It is the good that one does....motivated by the spirit of the heart....

-that is important in the eyes of God,

...not how scrupulously one keeps the laws and rituals mandated by tradition.

Through the centuries of Judaism....the scribes had constructed a rigid maze of definitions...admonitions...principles...and laws to explain the Pentateuch.

As a result...the ethics of religion were often buried under a mountain of rules and taboos....

Jesus' teachings re-focus the canons of Israel on the original covenant based on the wisdom and discernment of the human heart....

Faith begins with encountering God in our hearts....

**--our faith is expressed in the good that we do and the praise we offer in the depths of our hearts,
-- not simply in words and rituals performed "outside" ourselves.**

The kind of human beings we are, begins in the values of the heart....the place where God dwells within....

**....but the evil we are capable of,
....the hurt we inflict on others,
....the degrading of the world that God created/also begins "within"....when God is displaced by selfishness... greed....anger....or hatred.**

The faithful disciple understands that it is the values of the heart....

**....the compassion that dwells within,
....that makes even the messiest of houses holy places
where the love of God dwells.....**

**As we take this week's Word to mind and heart....please pray
with me:**

***O God of graciousness,
may your love and compassion
illuminate our hearts and spirits,
transforming our rooms and houses
into loving homes of welcome and forgiveness.***

***Come, make your dwelling in our midst,
making our tables and abodes
sacred spaces where your loving presence
loves, heals and protects.
Amen.***