**Homily** **for the 22nd Sunday of Ordinary Time**

*Rev. Francis D. Kim*

        What is a true and faithful Christian?

        First, a Christian is a person who has made a choice. We have to choose, just as Adam and Eve did in the garden of Eden, to obey God or rebel against Him. We make that choice initially when we commit our lives to Christ, but we also make that choice day by day, moment by moment. What kind of choices are you making?

        And, a Christian is a person whose life has been changed. That transformation is the work of the Holy Spirit. The moment we receive Christ, the moment we choose Him, the Spirit of God comes to live in our heart. What changes have taken place in your life, in your thoughts, feelings, behavior, relationships, since you chose to follow Jesus?

        And, a Christian is a person who has accepted a challenge. The challenge is Jesus’ call to deny self, our own selfish ambitions, our own selfish sinful pleasures, and take up our cross. In what ways are you denying yourself in order to follow Jesus?

        Choice, change, and challenge, these should characterize every faithful Christian. Are they true of you?

        Sometimes, we don’t realize how weak we are. We don’t realize how storing our Enemy is. We may even doubt if God is really going to help us. Or, we think that we can do it all ourselves, or that we must. But, we should ask God to take over in our lives. We should tell Him how weak, helpless, unstable, and unreliable we are.

        It is important that we stand aside and let Him take over in all our choices and decisions. That’s why Jesus came to the world to save us and help us. Whatever our difficulties, whatever our circumstances, we must remember, “Jesus is with us always and help us because He is our Savior.”

        In the Gospel today, the Scribes and the Pharisees were upset with Jesus because He allowed His disciples to break with their ritual traditions by eating with unclean hands. It was  Jewish tradition to wash and clean hands before they eat. Mark’s gospel explains that “for the pharisees and, in fact, all Jews, do not eat without carefully washing their hands, keeping the tradition of the elders.” The Jew thought when the hands washed, the person was ritually clean.
        So much so that in their minds, Jesus’ disciples were committing serious sin in neglecting this tradition. Their self righteous attitude allowed them to judge Jesus and His disciples as unfit for the Kingdom of God. So, they ask Jesus why this happens, and Jesus pushes back calling them “hypocrites.”

        Which is more important to God, clean hands or cleans mind and hearts? So, Jesus says, “That’s not enough to wash your hands.” He says the important thing is what springs from within. The crucial thing is how deep our faith is. Whether how we live shows love of God.

        The number of one temptation in religion is to think that following certain rules, doing certain things, or saying certain prayers, or performing magic ceremonies will automatically guarantee holiness and salvation.

        The religion of the heart comes from acting in the word of God, caring for the poor and the needy, and following our conscience as we worship God. Religion of the heart is based on a relationship of love and not on an obligation to a law.

        Real holiness translates into action. St. James tells us in the second reading, “The pure of heart take care of the poor and the needy.” We need to treat everyone as Christ, to love our neighbor as ourselves. And, in very practical ways. Like, making extra soup to take to a sick neighbor, being a big brother or big sister to a young boy or girl, volunteering our times and talent to care for others. The pure of heart acts out what they believe!

        Laws and rules and traditions don’t make us holy. Jesus is telling us in the Gospel, to put God at the center of your life and put love back into your heart and don’t get hung up on a bunch of man-made rules and regulations. Make religion truly a religion of the heart!