

Eastern Christian Bible Class:

## **The Gospel of Jesus Christ According to St. Mark**

### Chapter Seven

**READ MK 7:1-5**

Recall who were the Pharisees & the scribes: cf. ICSB Note on Mk. 2:6 & Article on Pg. 21

OBS (P. 106): We come to another conflict Jesus encounters with some Pharisees and scribes from Jerusalem (probably sent to spy on Jesus).

Q. What is the first thing they notice? A. He disregarded the customary ritual handwashing before meals.

ICSB Note 7:3 The Pharisees are not charging them with poor hygiene, but with "religious laxity."

OBS (P. 106): The Law mandated that Old Testament priests wash their hands before offering sacrifice (Ex. 30:19). The pharisees influenced Israel to apply this law for all people to wash away any ceremonial defilement they may have contracted from their contact with Gentile at the marketplace.

This practice was considered by the scribes (**who were** the religious scholars of the Law) to be a part of the oral law going back to Moses himself, the so-called "Tradition of the Elders" (v. 5). This included, as St. Mark tells us (v. 4), a multitude of other details as well -including such

minutiae as "the washing of cups and pitchers and copper-vessels." In other words their tradition had become full of trivialities.

OBS (Pg. 107) To the scribes this was not trivial at all of but of immense importance. To skip washing was to disregard the whole Tradition of the Elders (v. 5). It meant one was impure and defiled in the sight of heaven. Thus they are scandalized that Jesus (& His disciples) would willfully reject this tradition.

OSB 7:1-13

**READ MK 7:6-8**

OBS (Pg. 107) **Q.** In response to their criticisms, does Jesus explain or defend Himself? What does He do? **A.** He doesn't give the impression He is answerable to them or their erroneous interpretations. Instead He denounces their whole system of oral law. Jesus points to a passage in Isaiah which is **directly drawn** from our Septuagint translation of the Old Testament rather than the Hebrew (which shows even Jesus was familiar with the version we use in the Christian East). This passage from Is 29:13 LXX is a condemnation of those who pose as pious **people** before God, when actually their hearts are far from Him and what He really requires.

**READ MK 7:9-13**

(OBS, Pg. 108) There is a hint of sarcasm in our Lord's words (v. 9)." The word "well," in Gr. "kalos," is the same as that used by our Lord in v. 6. It is as if He is saying, "Isaiah was well to prophesy about you b/c of how well you have nullified God's Word!"

Jesus doesn't stop at this charge but then provides a common example of their abuse of **God's truth**: the use of "korban." Korban is Hebrew for an "offering" or "gift." According to the law of their time, "one could take something out of the common reckoning simply by pronouncing that it was "korban" or a gift to God.

Originally the idea of making a thing korban was simply that it was intended as a gift for sacrifice and could only be used for that (see Lev 2:1 LXX). By the Lord's time, it was accepted that one could pronounce the formula, "Korban to you be this **item** of property," and thereby make it off-limits to that person. [The item of property was not actually promised or given to the Temple, nor was it off-limits to the person owning it pronouncing the ban, who could still use the item -it was only off-limits to the person against whom the vow of korban was pronounced.]

Thus, **in this** example, the oral law could actually work against & undermine the Law of Moses, by the scribal understanding of korban, one was actually bound by the formula even if it meant hardship to one's parents. Obviously the Law of Moses was concerned with giving honor and help to one's parents as it commanded one to "honor" one's father and mother (Ex 20:12) and even said that one who spoke evil of father or mother was to be condemned (Ex 21:17). Thus this scribal law was a voiding of the actual Law of God. According to our Lord (v. 13), the scribes did many such things as this. **So their esteemed** "Tradition of the Elders" actually worked in contradiction to the divine Word it pretended to honor.

**READ MK 7:14-23**

Jesus in this passage calls together a crowd of His followers and returns to the subject of ritual uncleanness. He gives a radical pronouncement that there is actually nothing outside **a** man at all -no food eaten whatsoever- which, is able to defile him. **So** the scribes were totally wrong. It is not what goes into a man that defiles him but what comes out of him.

The disciples still don't understand so they ask Him about the parable. Jesus explains (v. 15) that true defilement before God is a matter of the heart and will. For from out of the heart of men... (v. 21, etc.). According to Jesus, these are the things which defile a man in the eyes of God.

The word translated "evil thoughts" in our Bible (in Greek *dialogismos*), is sometimes translated "doubts" (Lk 24;38). Here it embodies all man's rebellious resistance to God's will. Ever since the Enemy first casted "doubt" on God's goodness, saying, "Has God indeed said 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?" (Gen 3:1), man has doubted God and turned aside to his own wickedness.

These include all the acts that darken our world listed [here](#) by our Lord (review what [some words like](#) "fornication," etc., mean). [E.g., an "evil eye" is most likely "stinginess"]. This list is not meant to be exhaustive, but to adequately describe the wretched condition of the world. All these things, embodied in actions, first of all live in the human heart, and it is these things, proceeding from the heart, which truly defile.

ICSB Note 7:21 "the heart of man": In **Biblical** terminology, the heart is the center of the person and the

source of every decision that manifests itself through deeds. Jesus thus links true defilement with the heart, where evil actions and intentions have their hidden beginning. [So we must stop sin in our heart before it manifests itself in our deeds. As it says in the Epistle of St. James, “But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death (1:14-15).

OSB Note: 7:15-23

OBS Note the **parenthetical** declaration St. Mark adds at the end of v. 19: “Thus purifying all foods.” This is one of the sources showing **why** we Christians are free to eat foods previously forbidden to Jews. So, not merely bread eaten with unwashed hands, but also such previously forbidden foods as pork **–b/c** these foods also are external to man; they also do not go into his heart, but merely into the belly.

This **point** which St. Mark brings out was not seen or appreciated in **its** original Jewish context at the time Christ said it. The implications of our Lord's teaching, which St. Mark notes, **were** applied **later** in the early Church. **For example in the** first council (**which is** known as the “Apostolic Council”). In Acts 15:23-29 the council's decision **is given** and **there are** several references **there** to the Church's approach to dietary regulations.

ICSB Note 7:19 The early Church grappled much with the issues surrounding Old covenant dietary laws and table-fellowship in light of the Gospel (Acts 10:9-16, Rom 14:13-23, Gal 2:11-16, CCC 582).

## READ MK 7:24-30

ICSB Note 7:24 Tyre and Sidon: **Were** two Phoenician cities on the Mediterranean coast, north of Palestine. They were predominantly Gentile in population and **thus** contemptible to the Jews.

[SKIP: OSB 7:24-30]

OBS (Pg. 112): Now the lack of understanding by Israel is juxtaposed by our Lord's interaction with the Gentiles. By this St. Mark means to show us what really matters is not race **or ethnicity** but humble faith and trust in God.

ICSB Note 7:27: "the children first": The children of Israel hold first claim to the blessings of the new Covenant (CCC 839). Only after Jesus' Resurrection is the Gospel systematically proclaimed to all nations (Mt. 28:18-20). Jesus uses the term "dogs" to illustrate the progress **or** the "economia" of the Gospel: **Just** as children are properly fed before pets, so the Gospel must be offered to Israel before the Gentiles.

OBS (Pg. 112) For several chapters now our Lord had been trying to find some rest for Himself and His followers. They were keeping a frantic pace **sometimes** not even having time to eat (6:31). Jesus takes them to the very limits of the borders of Israel to the region of Tyre. There He hoped His **disciples** could find needed rest, so He entered a house and "wanted no one to know it" (v. 24).

Q. Does He find **peace & quiet** there? A. No, because "He could not escape notice." (v. 24)

A Greek (or Gentile) woman who was Syro-Phoenician by race (v. 25-26, i.e., belonging to that part of Phoenicia under the administration of Syria), finds out He is nearby and implores Him to come cast a demon out of her daughter (v. 26). Perhaps the Lord is reluctant to go to her home a far distance away because of His already exhausted disciples and followers.

Q. What is the woman's response to our Lord's reply?

A. The woman did not argue with the Lord. She had absolute faith in His love and mercy. Her statement "even the little dogs" could be taken as a reply to our Lord's concern for His worn-out disciples making another trip: She trusted in his power that they could continue to rest there, and the Lord need only speak His word and her daughter would be healed.

The Lord, impressed by her faith, tells her to return to her home & her faith in Him has brought about healing for her daughter.

This is a lesson for all of us. What is our response when the Lord tells us "No" to one of our heartfelt requests? Do we respond with trust in His loving providence? Or do we lose faith and doubt Him or His existence?

**READ MK 7:31-37**

ICSB Note 7:31 the Decapolis: The Decapolis was a confederation of ten cities in NT Palestine. There were predominantly Gentile in population, and most of them were located east of the Jordan River. Jesus continues his travel in Gentile territory.

The Lord departs from the region of Tyre & travels north to Sidon and then returns again to the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee to the predominantly Gentile district of Decapolis, thereby avoiding Galilee altogether (probably to avoid the crowds, cf. Mk 3:7).

The one brought to Him is deaf and has an impediment in his speech (v. 32). The Greek word is "*mogilalos*" (used also in Is 35:6 LXX), and can be translated "stammerer." The Lord takes him aside from the multitude to avoid **being renowned** as a **mere** wonder-worker.

Our Lord's next actions (v. 33 putting His fingers in his ears and spitting [on His finger] and touching his tongue) seem very odd to us -but for the ancients, saliva was thought to have curative powers (as it actually does to some degree). This touching of his tongue with the saliva, therefore, was a kind of natural anointing.

OSB Note 7:34 "He sighed..."

OBS: The Lord's sighing (v. 34) is understood as an audible expression of emotion motivated by **His** sorrow for man's fallen condition. As we pray in the Byzantine Prayer for the Blessing of the Water, "You [O Lord] could not bear to behold mankind oppressed by the devil." **Then** He utters a single Aramaic word: "Ephphatha!" (Be opened, v. 34).

This word has relevance for us all. In other words, for man to receive God's Divine power, life and healing, into his life, he must totally open himself up to the power of God.

OSB Note 7:36

Jesus commands them not to tell anyone, **again**, b/c He doesn't want to be regarded as a mere wonder-worker. Did they follow His command? A. No, because they were "astonished beyond measure!" (v. 37).

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