Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)

 “The devil fears hearts on fire with love of God.” *St. Catherine of Siena*

God cares more about what happens **on the inside** of our lives than what happens on the **outside**: he wants our **hearts**.

That's what he's trying to explain to the Pharisees, and to all his disciples, and to us.

* It is quite possible to appear perfectly Christian on the **outside** while being perfectly **selfish** on the **inside**.
* We can go to Mass regularly, avoid obviously lewd or sinful behavior in public, say prayers so that others will notice - we can do all those things **exteriorly** while constantly entertaining evil thoughts and self-centered desires **in our hearts**.
* That kind of divided life, which is called **hypocrisy**, can't last.
* As the old saying goes, unless we **live** according to what we **believe**, we will soon start **believing** in accordance with what we **live**.
* Or, as Jesus puts it elsewhere in the Gospels (cf. Matthew 6:21): where our **hearts** are, there our **treasure** is.

True followers of Jesus Christ can never be satisfied with merely **exterior** piety; we can never consider ourselves **superior** to others just because our sins are **less visible**.

* That's what the **Pharisees** did, and it **blinded** them to God's love; in fact, it tragically turned them into **enemies** of God.
* True religion has **exterior manifestations**, certainly, but they are meant to flow from and give expression to the experience of the heart.
* The heart is the place where we **decide** for or against our **conscience**, for or against **God's will**.
* Our friendship with Christ, and the purpose, strength, and vigor that flows out of that friendship, depend on our **inner allegiance to him**; looking like goody-two-shoes on the outside can never substitute for that.

Jesus doesn't care what we look like to **others**; he cares about **who we really are**.

We all should be striving to **live** as Catholic Christians faithful to Christ who lives in us.

This means at least **two things**.

First, it means that we **never stop trying** to think, speak, and behave as Jesus Christ would want us to. For to say we are Christian, and that is indeed what we are. It is important to act according to the person we represent.

* It's not a question of **eliminating** all of our self-centered and sinful attitudes, words, and actions in one fell swoop.
* Rather, it's a question of our **ongoing efforts through the power of the holy spirit**.
* Our spiritual life, in this sense, is like a **garden**.
* A good gardener can never simply **abandon** the garden to itself, even if the good plants are healthy and strong.
* To make the garden fulfill its purpose, a gardener has to water, fertilize, protect, and weed **on a regular basis**.
* We too have to **continuously strive** to know Christ and shape our lives according to his standards, on a regular, ongoing basis.
* If we stop making our effort, the **weeds** will take over.

Second, it means accepting and embracing **all** of the Church's official teaching, not just the **bits and pieces** that we feel personally fond of.

* A **cafeteria** Catholic, someone who **picks and chooses** among Catholic doctrine the way we pick and choose food items in a cafeteria, is not being a **faithful** Catholic.
* Certainly, we need to **educate ourselves** about all that the Catechism teaches, and that means, sometimes, honestly facing difficulties.
* But those **doctrines** are not **optional**; they are part of the **deposit of faith**, part of what God has revealed to us for our salvation.
* He is the **doctor**; we are only **patients**; and our **health and happiness** depend on following the doctor's orders.

Today Jesus will **renew his commitment** to us in this holy Mass.

When he does, let's renew **our** commitment to **him** by telling him how **strongly we desire** to live as **heart-first Catholics**, dependable, truthful, conscious followers of Christ, not pharisaical hypocrites.

Psalm 51

12 A clean heart create for me, O God;

renew within me a steadfast spirit

13Do not drive me from before your face,

nor take from me your holy spirit

14Restore to me the gladness of your salvation;

uphold me with a willing spirit.