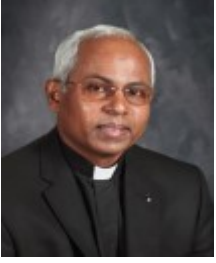


A Letter From Father Francis



My Dear Friends In Christ,

In today's Gospel, we observe a recurring pattern in Jesus' teaching method, which will become evident in the coming weeks. Initially, Jesus addresses the Pharisees who question Him, challenging their focus on ritual purity. He then turns to the crowd, teaching that it is not the food we eat but our words and actions that defile us. This distinction underscores a shift from external practices to internal transformation. Although verses that follow in the passage reveal that Jesus later explains His teachings to His disciples in private, Mark's narrative illustrates how Jesus tailored His messages to different audiences: His critics, the general populace, and His close followers.

To the Pharisees, Jesus' words often present a challenge, calling them to reconsider their emphasis on outward observances. To the crowd, His teachings are more general, sometimes requiring deeper reflection. With His disciples, who frequently struggle to understand, Jesus provides further explanations to clarify His message.

Jesus' teachings remain relevant to us today, challenging us to move beyond mere external compliance with religious rules. We might be tempted to focus on outward appearances, but Jesus reminds us that **true holiness is not achieved through rituals alone. Instead, holiness comes from allowing God's Spirit to transform our hearts. Our actions should naturally express this inner transformation, reflecting a genuine conversion to God's ways.** It emphasizes that true holiness is not about outward compliance with rules but about an inward transformation. This aligns with the message that Jesus conveys: our actions should stem from a heart genuinely transformed by God's Spirit, rather than from a mere adherence to external standards.

In this way, Jesus calls us to a more profound relationship with God—one where our external actions are a natural outflow of an inner change, rather than the other way around. This transformation is what ultimately leads us to true holiness. In essence, Jesus calls us to a deeper authenticity in our relationship with God—where our external actions are a genuine reflection of a heart that has been transformed by divine grace.

**See you at Mass,
Father Francis**

