

The church has rules doesn't it? I assume that all congregations have some type of constitution and bylaws that help to govern how it operates. And it is the job of the council to help make that happen.

Immanuel has a wedding guide book that lists out the rules about what can and cannot be done here. I have unofficially added one rule that protects Immanuel which basically states that if I see somebody drinking alcohol here then I will call the police and they will not be a part of the wedding because if I knowingly allow somebody to drink here and they get in an accident, then Immanuel is liable.

Rules are meant to help keep things in an orderly fashion. They are meant to protect us from any unnecessary issues that could pop up. But sometimes, we put too much emphasis on the rules.

In today's gospel reading, Jesus is challenging the traditional ways in which the religious leaders determine what is pure or impure. For Jesus, the observance of religious practices cannot become a substitute for good words or deeds that come from a faithful heart.

The Pharisees were saying the disciples were no longer pure because they did not stop to wash their hands before eating.

So, how many of you have always washed your hands every single time before eating? Heck, as a kid one of my chores was weeding the garden and when I wanted a snack, I would pull a carrot out of the ground, wipe the dirt off and eat it. I didn't bother washing my hands or the carrot for that matter.

So when I ate those carrots without washing them or my hands, did that make me corrupt or impure before God? From that moment on, have I been dishonoring God in everything I did because I did not eat with washed hands nor did I bother to wash the carrots? Doesn't make sense does it and that is the point that Jesus is making.

The Pharisees would say that yes, I have been defiled since that first time of doing that but Jesus disagreed. Jesus was saying that what defiles us is not what goes into our bodies but rather it is what comes out of our hearts.

Jesus even took it a step further and rattled off a number of things that comes from the heart that defiles our bodies and they include fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, and folly.

Fornication is having a sexual relationship with somebody without being married.

Theft is the taking or making plans to take something that is not yours where you have no intention of paying for the item.

Murder is the taking of another's life without provocation.

Adultery is cheating on your spouse and Martin Luther makes it clear that if you even fantasize about it, then you are committing adultery.

Avarice is greed; the love of money.

Wickedness is a broad category because it covers anything evil, especially when we are talking about our actions.

Deceit is being dishonest.

Licentiousness has a couple of meanings. First it covers recklessness and it could be referring to wastefulness. I am leaning towards wastefulness because we are called by God to be good stewards of the world, and yet many times we tend to neglect our environment.

Envy is talking about jealousy. There really is no reason to be jealous of somebody else because each one of us has been created by God and we have our own gifts and talents that we can do.

Slander is the telling of lies about another to smear their reputation.

Pride covers a number of characteristics which causes you to feel that you are better than others. It is a sense of self-importance.

Folly covers madness, foolishness, stupidity and craziness.

Today's gospel reading doesn't hold much for good news because Jesus calls us on the carpet for our behavior. The list of what defiles that Jesus told the Pharisees is also being spoken to us and we are just as guilty as they were. Our actions, the things that come from our heart are what defiles us and makes us unworthy of God's grace.

The sermon could and probably should end here with us thinking about the ways that our own thoughts and actions defile us, but I cannot end here because we need God's grace. Yes we are unworthy of all that God does for us, but HE still opens HIS arms and comforts us in our sinfulness. We live in forgiveness that overcomes everything that defiles us.

Jesus did not offer it in our reading because they needed to think about it. We too need to think about it but we also need to be reminded that God offers forgiveness to all who ask. Give serious thought to what defiles you and then ask for God's forgiveness to set you free.