

## Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year B

Dt 4:1-2, 6-8

Ps 15:2-3, 3-4, 4-5

Jas 1:17-18, 21b-22, 27

Mk 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

Shawn Tracy, O.S.A.

Our readings today suggest that we think about what we do, how we do it and why! In short, they give us a chance to ponder the motivation, the integrity and the direction of the work we do with our lives.)

In our first reading today Moses was very authoritative with his people. He instructs them to follow the laws and decrees laid down by him in the name of their God. If they do this, they will not only serve God faithfully, but will demonstrate to the nations a unique wisdom and an intelligence that will be the envy of nations.

The Gospel of Mark follows up and develops this powerful biblical theme – but at a much deeper spiritual level. The mere execution of external laws and decrees will never be enough in a faithful life. We must always look deeper into the motivations and intent of the actions we take in living the life of the Spirit. It's not just about what you do! It's how and why you do it that makes the difference.

There are two kinds of work that our scriptures can encourage us to ponder this week. The first is our work in liturgy. The very word “liturgy” in its Greek derivation means “the work of the people.” So we need to ask ourselves the questions pertaining to our way of doing the work of liturgy.

As a presider at Sunday worship I can always tell those people who have come to worship with enthusiasm, desire, and the will to give thanks to God. Such folks are prepared, ready and able to take responsibility for their role in liturgy. They sing, respond, greet, welcome, reflect and in every way offer themselves body and spirit to God. Often they have already read the scriptures of the day (easily obtained through the web or missalettes). They find a deep communion in faith with the worshipping community. They know they belong to a Body of Christ!

Others express themselves as though waiting to be moved by the outer ritual expression, the homily, the requirement of presence, the sense of duty – but do not appear to understand that this “work of the people” requires a committed level of presence, understanding and purpose. Just as in the words of Deuteronomy, or the Jesus warning in Mark, the emphasis appears to be all too much on a peripheral participation in the rite while the inner spirit appears underdeveloped and under represented.

The other kind of work is that of our job, our household responsibilities, and the needs of

our children. In our culture there is a thin line between work that traps us and work that frees us. How many times have you heard a friend or neighbor complain about his or her job, how exhausting it is. Many people will admit that they only do their job for the money, and it seems that they have no choice but to do what they actually dislike doing. They find little meaning in their work and their friends get tired of hearing their complaints.

So how do you bring spirit, satisfaction and meaning to the external efforts that you make in a daily workday? What's the secret to restoring energy and good feelings to the daily routine? It's the same predicament that Jesus noticed in the Pharisees where the externals of religious practice neglected the spirit required for the law to be fulfilled. Work without meaning – rituals without spirit – actions without love – routine without energy – it happens all the time. How do you get to the source?

Thus Jesus quotes Isaiah: "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me."

To develop a deeper spiritual awareness, it is necessary to map out times and places where you ponder what you do and why you do it. Each of us needs to schedule appointments with oneself each day for the purpose of reflection and thanksgiving. Running off from one thing to another without reflective opportunities just won't do! We need to reflect on the people with whom we share work in order to appreciate them. We need to see them as subjects of mutual respect, which is much more beautiful than just putting up with others because you have to.

This is Labor Day weekend and we look to find rest and relaxation from the work we do. We gather at this Eucharist liturgy for the purpose of giving thanks - and we want to do so with spirit! Ponder the work you share with others during the week and we ask the Spirit to fill you with loving purpose. In all ways, "to live is Christ!"