



# Sunday Reflection

## Ordinary Time

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew  
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 29 August 2021

# Pentecost

## 14

We serve a holy God who calls us to be a holy people. However, the Lord knows we cannot manage this in our own strength. God helps us in our weakness, gradually changing us from within through the Holy Spirit. So let us come together and rejoice in God's transforming grace.



## Reflection for this week's Gospel

**“For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come...”** Mark 7:21

### An Illustration to set the scene

Since the introduction of the smartphone, taking selfies (photos of yourself) has become extremely popular.

Selfies are not always spontaneous snaps but are often carefully crafted images.

Indeed, the internet is full of advice on how to look your very best in a selfie.

For example, we are told that holding your phone too low when taking a picture results in an unattractive double chin, whereas lifting your phone high up at arm's length produces a far more flattering result.

Selfie aficionados spend hours practising how best to tilt and turn their faces to produce the most attractive image of themselves and know exactly how to utilise light to ensure their pictures give them a blemish-free, dewy complexion.

There are even apps that can be used to erase spots, whiten teeth and widen eyes.

Most of us have heard the saying “*beauty is only skin deep*” and would agree that how someone looks on the outside reveals little about what they are actually like.

However, the popularity of the selfie shows there is still a tendency to worry more about appearances than inner character and qualities.

## **Looking at the teaching of the Gospel**

**In today's Gospel reading we see the Pharisees had a similar flaw, for they, too, were focused on external appearances and had failed to pay attention to what they were really like inside.**

They were very keen to keep not only the Ten Commandments, but all the rules and regulations contained in the Pentateuch (*the first five books of our Old Testament*).

Indeed, they were so keen not to break any of these rules that they'd come up with a body of their own oral regulations, known as the *Tradition of the Elders*, to spell out exactly how they believed God's laws should be kept in practice.

These laws, for example, specified exactly **what activities counted as work** to ensure that no one broke the commandment not to work on the sabbath.

**The handwashing that Jesus' disciples failed to practise was one of these oral regulations.** It was not a hygiene measure, but a form of ritual washing believed to ensure religious purity.

Jesus clashed with the Pharisees over their preoccupation with their regulations.

This was not because he disagreed with keeping God's commandments, but because he felt that their oral rules did not help them fulfil God's laws.

Ritual handwashing, for instance, may have made them seem godly to others, but it was an external act that did nothing to remove sinful thoughts and attitudes lurking within.

The Pharisees' rituals and rules also created a false sense of security, for they made them self-satisfied with their piety and encouraged them to overlook their sinful nature.

Jesus teaches that failing to practise ritual handwashing cannot make anyone spiritually unclean.

**Rather, it is ungodly thoughts such as envy, pride and greed that contaminate us, for they inspire sin** and manifest themselves in the form of hurtful and selfish behaviour.

### **How can we reflect on the application to our lives?**

Our reading deals with religious rituals practised two thousand years ago.

**However, the principle underlying Jesus' words is still relevant.**

We all know there's a gap between the image we present to others and what we're really like.

This mismatch between their outer and inner lives is what Jesus was getting at when he called the Pharisees hypocrites: **we have similar issues.**

We can hide our sinful thoughts, bad attitudes and internal struggles from others, even those closest to us, but we can't hide our inner selves from God.

We may think God is satisfied as long as we attend church and put a decent amount on the offering plate, or read our Bible daily, and so on.

However, Jesus' teaching warns us not to fall into the same trap as the Pharisees, who thought their religious practices were a substitute for real change.

**The transformation Jesus talks about is challenging, for it necessitates being honest with ourselves and with God about our sinful thoughts, unloving attitudes and personality flaws, and these are not things many of us like to think about.**

But by seeking God's help to change we are fulfilling our fundamental calling as Christians to become more like Jesus.

**Are we ready and willing to fulfil that calling?**

**"For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come..."** *Mark 7:21*

Please share your response to this reflection to [Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk](mailto:Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk) – did anything speak to you? Did you feel challenged, angered, consoled by something in the words? How did God' spirit move you as you read it? Have you shared the words with someone else? Is this a worthwhile thing to make available to folk whilst we cannot meet for corporate worship to share in word and sacrament? What are your thoughts?

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