

Pentecost 14 (Proper 17)
September 2, 2012
Text: Mark 7:14-23
Theme: "What Goes in Must Come Out"

We all understand the maxim: garbage in, garbage out. With respect to computers, if you feed in the wrong information, you will get a wrong answer. With respect to health, if you live on coffee and donuts, you will eventually have poor health. With respect to morality, if you consume enough immoral material and immerse yourself in immoral people your faith will weaken under the onslaught and you will eventually compromise your own morality. However, having said that, it works the other way too. The more we immerse ourselves in God's Word and Sacrament, the stronger our faith becomes and the less we are likely to compromise our own morality. Good stuff in and good stuff out.

Yet, Jesus is clear that bad stuff from outside cannot hurt you spiritually. Well what is that supposed to mean? Is it all right then to live however you like and you never have to worry about your salvation? Well, yes...and no. Because we are filled with the Holy Spirit, with Baptismal waters running over us, and the body and blood of Christ nourishing us, we have full protection against the evil from without. The evil from without cannot enter us or harm us because we are too powerful.

However, being human, we have free will and therefore the ability to produce our own garbage from within. We don't have to go out for it. We can create it right here at home. When we choose to produce evil from within, things get complicated. Like the maxim, "garbage in, garbage out," we can create garbage from within, that is sin and evil from within our dark human souls and when we create garbage from within, we see a river of garbage flow out.

In our Old Testament reading, Moses warns the people to pay careful attention to God's Law to prevent this garbage production from happening. Remember that God's Law is more than just rules by which to live. The Law of God is everything God says both command and promise, both demands and gifts. The statutes and rules of God, when followed, do Gospel work. The 10 Commandments were given because, when followed, they will produce the defenses necessary in our lives to protect us from falling into harm's way. They become the very armor of God of which St. Paul speaks.

Moses, speaking to people who are about to enter a foreign godless land where there is plenty of garbage, wanted to make sure that they were well armored against everything that would make them sick. He said,

“Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children’s children...”

When we are filled up with God, we are protected and what comes out of us is good works – things that are pleasing to God and those good works also arm us against the slings and arrows of Satan. Check yourself. If you don’t see good works flowing from your life, it is because you have forgotten to arm yourself with God. If you are filled with God, he will burst forth from you like the blinding sunrise over the ocean. You will see good works and holy living abounding in your life. If God is in low supply, you will see evil, debauchery, worldliness, meanness, misery and selfishness, that will ooze out of you like puss oozes out of a sore.

So the goal is simple. Stay armed. Jesus Christ died on the cross to give us paradise. That is grace. Then he sent the Holy Spirit to give us faith to believe and grasp grace. Keep that hold on grace strong and don’t help Satan by weakening the armor. Remain filled with God from Baptism unto death. Good stuff in and good stuff out. This place is the filling station where we remember our Baptisms, feed on the body and blood of Christ and hear God’s Word. Our faith is strengthened. Good works abound in our lives and Satan is foiled.

Bring yourselves but don't stop there. Bring your children and your parents and your neighbors. Invite everyone you can find to this place every week so that all of God's people will be filled with the Holy Spirit and we will be a well armed and powerful people.