



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



# The Holy Gospel According to St. Mark

## Chapter 7

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# Introduction

## Chapter Outline

- Defilement Comes from Within 7:1-23
- A Gentile Shows Her Faith 7:24-30
- Jesus Heals a Deaf-Mute 7:31-37

# Defilement Comes from Within

## 7:1-23



- *the Pharisees and some of the scribes*, They were probably representatives that were sent to examine Jesus in the same way they sent men to question John the Baptist, John 1:19-20
- Having heard of His miracles, and that He Has come into the land of Gennesaret; they came together to Jesus, to watch and observe what was said and done by Him, and that they may find something against Him
- These were not of that country, but were of Jerusalem, as were their companions the Scribes



# Defilement Comes from Within

## 7:1-23



- The Pharisees would not eat their food with unwashed hands, because they thought that their hands were defiled with the common handling of things, Matthew 15:11-12
- They observed that some of the disciples were eating without washing their hands first
- It was an opportunity to accuse Him
- And particularly to eat with unwashed hands, was inexcusable in a disciple of a wise man; for they looked upon this to be the characteristic of one of the vulgar people, a common and illiterate man
- By this also they distinguished a Jew from a Gentile

# Defilement Comes from Within

## 7:1-23



- The evangelist here explained to us, how the Jews used to wash *cups, pitchers, copper vessels, and couches*, and everything coming from the marketplace, holding the tradition of the elders
- *and all the Jews*, The custom of which Mark speaks was not, he says, peculiar to the Pharisees as a sect; it had passed, through their influence, to the whole body of the people
- As they expanded their authority over all religious matters in the first century BC, the Pharisees began to preach the doctrine that the ritual purity practices that applied to the priests should be applied to all the covenant people

# Defilement Comes from Within

## 7:1-23



- They added their own interpretation of religious customs to the Law
- The Pharisees are not charging Jesus and His disciples with poor hygiene but with a deliberate disregard for religious observances of the Law
- The Law of Moses prohibited contact with many things deemed to be unclean; and if any one had touched them he was counted unclean, so that he might not approach the temple until he had cleansed himself by the washing prescribed in the Law
- The design being that by means of these ceremonial and bodily washings the Jews might be awakened to the necessity of spiritual cleansing



# Defilement Comes from Within

## 7:1-23



- Our Lord quotes against them a prophecy of Isaiah, 29:13
- The prophet here gives the cause of the blindness of the Jews, because they honored God with their lips, while their heart was far from Him
- They worshipped God, not according to that spiritual worship which He had commanded, but after the traditions of men and of their own scribes, partly pointless, partly wicked and disobedient, and contrary to God's Law
- So He says, *“well did Isaiah prophesy of you”*

# Defilement Comes from Within

## 7:1-23



- The Pharisees accused His disciples of breaking, not the Lord's commandment, but the tradition of elders
- But He revealed to them, from the Law and prophets, that they are acting out of hypocrisy
- They preferred the oral law, or the traditions of the elders over the Law of God
- They rejected the commandments and Laws of God in order to preserve their own traditions
- So, Jesus is asking them is it right to set aside the commandments of God in order to uphold their traditions?



# Defilement Comes from Within

## 7:1-23



- Jesus began to make the charge that they have used "tradition" to nullify the Law of God
- First, Jesus gives an example of their deliberate abuse of the Law from the fourth of the Ten Commandments that requires one to honor one's father and mother, Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16 and the prohibition against cursing one's parents that imposes the death penalty, Exodus 21:17; Leviticus 20:9

# Defilement Comes from Within

## 7:1-23



- He accuses the Pharisees of manipulating these commands that requires caring for aging parents by declaring portions of their wealth to become *qorban*, a Hebrew word meaning a gift of something like property or money that is dedicated to God
- Thus, allowing them to neglect their parents
- Jesus denounces them for this practice
- Giving gifts to the Temple does not exempt the people from the obligation of honoring their parents through their financial support
- *making the word of God of no effect*, Here the structure of the sentence points to the “tradition” as being the instrument with which the Law was made null and void

# Defilement Comes from Within

## 7:1-23



- *He had called all the multitude to Himself*, Having said what was sufficient to stop the Scribes and Pharisees, about their unjustifiable traditions; He turns Himself to the common people, who probably stood at some distance, because of these esteemed teachers, and called to them to come nearer to Him
- He called them to come near that all might hear that which concerned all alike
- The words are given with more emphasis here than as recorded by St. Matthew



# Defilement Comes from Within

## 7:1-23



- Every one was solemnly invited to hearken and understand, while He announced a principle of the highest importance
- His object was to show that all impurity springs from the heart and that, unless the heart is cleansed, all external washings are in vain
- It is the sin in the heart, and what proceeds from it
- All evil thoughts, wicked words, and impure actions; which denominate a man unclean, and expose him to the judgment of God

# Defilement Comes from Within

## 7:1-23



- The foods designated "clean" and "unclean" were meant to separate the Israelites from their pagan neighbors and to remind the Israelites that they were a pure and holy people dedicated to God
- This is the first of the ritual commandments of the Old Covenant that Jesus has changed
- Ritual defilement was an external condition under the Old Covenant, but the New Covenant penetrates the heart to cleanse and govern the inward life of the believer
- It is the beginning of the end of the separation between Jew and Gentile

# Defilement Comes from Within

## 7:1-23



- Our Lord, having proclaimed this great principle to the multitude in the presence of their teachers, the scribes and Pharisees, returned into the house
- From St. Matthew we learn that the questioner was St. Peter, Matthew 15:15
- Our Lord had already, in His sermon on the mount, taught His disciples fully wherein purity or impurity of heart consists, and He might, therefore, with good reason, ask them how it was that they, even they who had been so favored by being constantly with Him, had forgotten or misunderstood Him



# Defilement Comes from Within

## 7:1-23



- Our Lord's illustration is physically accurate
- The part which is available for nourishment is, in its passage through the system, converted into body fluid (chyle), the matter from which the blood is formed
- What is not available for nourishment passes away
- The idea throughout is that ethical defilement is alone of importance
- The heart is the seat and fountain of all moral pollution; and if that is not defiled, no other part can be; and the heart is not defiled by eating and drinking

# Defilement Comes from Within

## 7:1-23



- *out of the heart of men*, That is, from the reason and the will, of which the heart is the symbol
- Man's heart is wicked, and desperately so; it is full of evil; and out of the abundance of it, proceed the evil things hereafter mentioned
- St. Matthew, 15:20 adds here, "*But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man.*"
- This is the end and scope of the parable, which is to show that unwashed hands and unclean bread defile not a man, but only an impure, wicked and corrupt will

# A Gentile Shows Her Faith

## 7:24-30



- Some scholars believe that this teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ, presented to the scribes and the Pharisees, as well as to the multitude, is a fitting introduction to the this miracle, concerning the healing of the daughter of the Phoenician woman
- As through it, the Lord intended to confirm, that there are no clean people and unclean ones; but the need is for the inner pure heart
- Jesus makes His journey into Gentile territory where Jews are living



# A Gentile Shows Her Faith

## 7:24-30



- He travels west toward the Mediterranean Sea into the district of two great Gentile trading centers, Tyre and Sidon
- *wanted no one to know it*, Why did he enter in secret, and wanted no one to know it?
- Perhaps Jesus tries to have a little private time but word of His arrival in the area has already spread
- Some scholars believe that the Lord, having seen how the Pharisees have criticized His disciples for eating with unwashed hands; what would be their reaction if they saw the Lord Himself getting to people considered by them as unclean, even designated as 'little dogs'?!

# A Gentile Shows Her Faith

## 7:24-30



- A Gentile woman approaches Jesus
- She respectfully falls at Jesus' feet appeals to Him to heal her daughter of demon possession
- She falls at His feet and with great respect and reverence to so venerable a person, and earnestly entreated mercy for her child; believing He had power to cast the devil out of her, though at a distance from her
- *a Greek*, St. Matthew, 15:22 describes her as a “woman of Canaan”, St. Mark calls her a Greek
- Everything, therefore, was against this woman, yet she was not hindered by that

# A Gentile Shows Her Faith

## 7:24-30



- It was as though the Master wished to proclaim to His disciples, how the Jews had closed before themselves the doors of His love, despite what He offered them; while the Gentiles came to Him, humbly and faithfully, despite His secret approach to them
- And in order to reveal to them, more clearly, the extent of faith of the Gentiles in Him, He was at first reluctant to grant the woman her request
- Also, He does not give her a decided denial; He seems to mark to her the fact



# A Gentile Shows Her Faith

## 7:24-30



- Using the example of a family, Jesus states that the children must be fed before the family dogs. Jesus is acknowledging the claim of Israel as God's "firstborn son" and the priority of their claim to the Messiah
- In the Greek text, Jesus' response is softened by the term "little dogs" or "puppies" (*kynarion*), suggesting domesticated "house dogs." and not the fierce dogs of watch; which alleviates the matter a little bit
- That, together with the tone of speech and of voice, have encouraged the Phoenician woman to resume the conversation

# A Gentile Shows Her Faith

## 7:24-30



- She cleverly makes an argument in response to Jesus rebuke that even the house dogs eat the scraps under their master's table, suggesting that the Gentiles as well as the Jews are fed by God
- She accepts the declaration of Christ, and in that very declaration she affirms that it involved the granting of her petition
- As if she is saying, "I accept the title and the place; for the dogs have a portion of the bread; not the first, not the children's portion, but a portion still - the crumbs which fall from the table"

# A Gentile Shows Her Faith

## 7:24-30



- The persistence of the woman's petition, her humility in not being offended by Jesus' negative response, and her profession of faith that even the Gentiles need God, leads Jesus to compliment her and to grant her petition to heal her daughter
- There are two miracles: the healing of the woman's daughter and the conversion of the Gentile woman
- Her conversion prefigures the conversion of the Gentile nations to faith in Jesus as their Lord God and their entrance into the New Covenant in Christ Jesus in fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah 66:18 where God promised, "*I will gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come and see My glory.*"



# A Gentile Shows Her Faith

## 7:24-30



- For with those words of Christ she was abundantly satisfied, and went away
- She came to Christ with a great faith that Christ was able to heal her daughter and accordingly *she found the demon gone out of* her daughter
- Her daughter was entirely dispossessed of demon, and no more tormented with him, but in perfect ease, and at rest
- Christ never put any from Him that falls at His feet, which a poor trembling soul may do

# Jesus Heals a Deaf-Mute

## 7:31-37



- It seems that the Lord Jesus Christ, did not wish to stay long among the Gentiles, to avoid offending the Jews, who would see Him as a breaker of the Law, having fellowship with the 'unclean' Gentiles
- This is one of the few instances where the friends of the sufferer brought the sick man to Christ
- They brought him perhaps having heard of His fame, and perhaps they had seen miracles performed by Him
- *impediment in his speech*, The Greek signifies one that speaks little, or with difficulty

# Jesus Heals a Deaf-Mute

## 7:31-37



- This story is told only in the Gospel according to St. Mark
- *And He took him aside*, This was done, perhaps, to fix the attention of the afflicted man upon Himself, and upon the fact that He was about to act upon his ears and his tongue
- However, many reasons have been given by scholars for this procedure
- Perhaps Jesus was avoiding vain glory by the crowd
- Or, is that Jesus did not wish to be drawn into a new ministry of healing on a large scale



# Jesus Heals a Deaf-Mute

## 7:31-37



- *put His fingers in his ears*, Deafness is first dealt with; it was the primary evil
- *looking up to heaven*, He looked up to heaven, because from thence come all good things - words for the dumb, hearing for the deaf, healing for all infirmities; and thus He would teach the infirm man by a manifest sign to what place he was to look for the true source of his cure
- *He sighed*, Pitying the sufferings of the man who stood before Him
- Why did our Lord sigh at such a moment?

# Jesus Heals a Deaf-Mute

## 7:31-37



- We know indeed that He was *"a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;"*
- But now we might almost have expected a momentary smile of loving joy when He was about to give back to this afflicted man the use of these valuable instruments of thought and action
- But He sighed even then; for He was touched with the feeling of human infirmity, and no doubt His comprehensive eye would take in the vast amount of misery, both bodily and spiritual, which has come upon the world through sin

# Jesus Heals a Deaf-Mute

## 7:31-37



- *Ephphatha*, This word is, of course, addressed to the man himself; and the evangelist has retained the original Aramaic word, as he has retained “Talitha cumi” Mark 5:41
- So that the actual word which passed through the Savior's lips, and restored speech and hearing to the afflicted, might be handed on, as doubtless it will be, to the end of time



# Jesus Heals a Deaf-Mute

## 7:31-37



- *his ears were opened*, This is mentioned first as the source of the other problems
- The cure was thus alike instantaneous and perfect
- The command seems to have been given, both to the deaf and dumb man, and to those who brought him
- And it was given partly, no doubt, for His own sake, and for reasons connected with His gradual manifestation of Himself to the world

# Jesus Heals a Deaf-Mute

## 7:31-37



- And partly for the instruction of His disciples, and to show that He did not desire by His miracles to win the vain applause of men
- St. Augustine says that "our Lord desired, by putting this restraint upon them, to teach how much more fervently they ought to preach Him, whom He commissions to preach, when they who were forbidden could not be silent"
- *He has done all things well*, Performed the most extraordinary cures in the most humble and graceful manner

# Jesus Heals a Deaf-Mute

## 7:31-37



- Whereas there were many that hated and persecuted Him, as an evil doer; these are ready to witness for Him, not only that He has done no evil, but that He has done a great deal of good, and has done it well, modestly, humbly, fervently and devotedly
- His servants must learn from Him, who was thus meek and lowly; neither acting as in their own strength, when they attempt a spiritual cure, nor proclaiming their own praise when they have effected it
- Then would they likewise do all things well





# Discussion

- Why does Jesus condemn the contemporary practice of declaring one's personal possessions *Corban*, or dedicated to God?
- In what two ways does Jesus set aside the distinctions between clean and unclean?
- Why does Jesus place the source of defilement within the *heart* of a person rather than, say, the imagination?



# Discussion

- Why does Jesus say that the children must be fed before the dogs when the Gentile woman requests that He heal her daughter? What does the term “dog” indicate in this passage? What does the woman’s reply reveal about her?
- How much of your prayer during the liturgy amounts to little more than lip service? How do you cope with distractions during prayer? What do you bring to the liturgy so as to draw your heart near to God?



# Discussion

- How well do you obey the command to honor your parents? What do you do to show them honor?
- Why do you think Jesus took the man aside to heal him in private? How has Jesus dealt privately with you (rather than treating you as part of a group)?