



## Things to Ponder

- [About the Author](#)
- [Order](#)
- [About the Book](#)
- [Reviews](#)
- [Readers' Comments](#)
- [News & Events](#)
- [A Prayer for the Day](#)
- [Things To Shout Out!](#)
- [Things to Ponder](#)
- [My Favorite Quotes](#)
- [FAQ](#)
- [Contact](#)
- [Home](#)

## Homily – Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

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### Introduction: Keep Up Appearances - Walk the Talk

This Sunday, our lectionary reading returns to Mark's Gospel after several Sundays in which we heard the Bread of Life discourses from the Gospel of John. In this weekend's Gospel, Mark provides a significant amount of information (that may be foreign to us today) about the Jewish observance of ritual purity laws. Most scholars believe that Mark includes this information because his audience at that time included Gentile Christians who had no real knowledge or experience of these laws. We can infer, therefore, that many in Mark's community (around 65 AD) were not Jewish Christians.

To put this Gospel passage into context, in Jewish tradition there are clear boundaries between the sacred and the profane, between the "holy" and the secular or "common." The Jewish people saw themselves as consecrated to God, and their traditions and ritual laws as "support systems" to protect them as God's blessed. And the laws concerning food were part of this larger context. For example, eating kosher food and using kosher dishes were an acknowledgment that all life is sacred to the Lord. And washing hands before eating was originally more than good hygiene. They were also acts of ritual purification – signaling the Jewish desire to consecrate and "make holy" this most basic of human activities. In short, the whole discussion in this Gospel passage should be regarded in this context and not as an argument over trivial rules.

At first glance, Jesus' sayings appear to challenge the Jewish dietary laws and long-held traditions. This is far from the truth, for Jesus was a faithful practicing Jew who observed the Jewish traditions. As in much of his teaching, his intent appears not so much to disregard or challenge external rules as to focus on internal realities: "from within people, from within their hearts." *What is within one's soul and heart is the priority, not the external ritual act.*

In this long and complex passage, Jesus is focusing on several truths for the Pharisees to consider and his followers (Jewish men and women) to ponder. First, all is sacred. All is holy. There is no separation or boundaries. *All creation is charged with the grandeur of God!* In fact, Jesus does not shun the common, the ordinary, the "profane," but continually seeks to transform it! The Kingdom of God is already beginning here – now! Holiness is all around us if we seek it. *Where do you see holiness?*

Secondly, Jesus harshly criticizes the Pharisees, Jewish spiritual leaders, who honor the Holy One with their lips, not their hearts. Worship is not merely a routine observance of human rituals, customs, or traditions; for worship demands an intentive inner spirit. Merely reciting words or doing acts for others to see – is not worship. It's ego.

Lastly, Jesus emphasizes that “holiness” is really “wholeness” of life. Holiness comes from within and is seen in the actions, attitudes, and words that emerge from a person's life. *Are you holy?*

I would invite you to take time to read and ponder the words *from Gospel of Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23:*

What word or words caught your attention?  
What in this passage comforted/challenged you?

### **Further Reflections and Questions**

Jesus warns us against performing actions for the sake of “keeping up appearances.” On the contrary, what counts is the inner motivation. *What moves you to do good deeds?*

The Pharisees brought a “policing” attitude to their practice of faith. They compared themselves to others, looking down on those who lived differently. *Have you ever noticed a similar attitude in yourself?*

In this earthy and practical passage, Jesus is teaching us that what really matters is the state of our hearts. *Is your heart in good shape?*

*What traditional prayers, devotions, rituals support your faith?*

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