

**Fr. Nick Dant's Homily, Saint Matthew Catholic Church, Indianapolis  
Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time, Sept. 1-2, 2018, Cycle B**

This weekend we return to the Gospel of Mark, and we will continue to read from the Gospel of Mark for our Gospel passage from now until we come to the new liturgical year with Advent. Jesus gives us a challenge this weekend not to let ourselves get overly worked up about external rituals our religious laws may require from us. He chastises the Pharisees and the scribes of his day for being overly scrupulous about external rituals, rather than being concerned with what really matters – interior conversion of the heart away from those things that can really defile us. Now, we have to be careful here. Jesus is not condemning the Mosaic Law of his ancestors; rather he is condemning an attitude! There is nothing wrong with washing ones hands before eating meals. In fact, we moderns know how important washing hands can be – we know about germs and micro-organisms that can spread sickness and disease. In Jesus' day they did not know about micro-organisms; killing germs was not the reason for washing hands. Washing hands was supposed to be a ritual symbolic of the interior conversion going on in one's heart. The problem was that too many people thought that the ritual of washing hands, cups, kettles, jugs, and beds is what made their hearts pure. Jesus is saying: "Is washing a humbling sign of your need for conversion, or just a purity show? If you think clean fingernails are all you need to put you in the right relationship with God, your hearts and heads are in the wrong place!"

How can we go about true conversion of our hearts; what is the true living out the spirit of God's Law? I believe the Letter of James gives us the answer:

"Religion that is pure and undefiled...is this: to care for orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained in the world."

To care for orphans and widows in their afflictions is biblical shorthand for caring and serving all those in need. Love and service of others is doing the heart of God's law and the way we truly convert our hearts – a good message for us to hear as we welcome this weekend the Little Sisters of the Poor to reach out and care for our needy elderly.