

## **Bulletin Reflection 2021.08.29. Year B1. Week 22. Ordinary Time.**

### ‘Whose Master?’ vs ‘Whose disciples?’

Apparently some of Jesus’ disciples did not wash their hands before eating, which caught the attention of the Pharisees and the scribes. These vigilant arbiters immediately jumped at this apparent disrespect of their traditions and laws. The real issue, however, was that their interpretations and practises favoured the precepts which were man-made rather than God-given, hence the Lord’s rebuke: “You put aside the commandment of God to cling to human traditions.”

In essence, they were blaming Jesus for the faults of his followers, meaning they defined the Master by his disciples rather than the disciples by their Master. A similar pattern can be observed when they complained about the Lord mingling and dining with sinners and tax collectors (Mt 9:11). It was as if Jesus’ reputation hung on the quality of his friends. So they tried to discredit the Lord for his company, when in fact his company were elevated by Jesus’ presence among them (C.f. Mt 21:31 – “Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you.”) According to the logic of the Gospel, the Lord gave even the sinners a new identity for becoming his disciples. Seeing Christ with these outcasts, the Jewish leaders presumed that he too must be a sinner. Instead, seeing them with the Lord, they should have recognised the power of his conversion on these ostensibly irredeemable souls.

Ordinarily, a group is identified by its unifying principle, which explains why we are called Christians – followers of Christ – as we are gathered in his name. However, just like the Jewish authorities did, many make the mistake of defining Jesus and his Church by the transgressions of his individual disciples. Even among the faithful many have ‘lost faith’ citing the sins of some clergy or other members of the community. But why accuse the Master for the fault of his followers? Should we not bother with Jesus because some of his disciples have unclean hands?

It’s important to remember that even the best human instruments are not the actual object of faith. For holiness is a sign of the Lord’s grace at work rather than pure human excellence without Him. A disciple can never be the master, so we must recognise his virtues not as his own, but as the result of faithful cooperation with God’s Divine Will. So we need to focus on God always and be careful not to turn faith into a cult of the individual priest, bishop, pope, or even a saint. For whatever good you see in them is nothing more than a tiny reflection of the goodness of the Lord.