

Homily given on August 30, 2009 at the 9am mass

The headline of my homily this morning is “How is your heart doing today?” Yes, really “How is your heart doing today?”

If we eat right and exercise regularly, we know that our hearts remain in good condition and this in turn determines the quality and length of our lives. **This is true not only of our physical hearts and life but also of our spiritual heart and life. The Gospel of John of the past 5 Sundays taught us about the nourishment we need for eternal life – namely the eucharist.** Two things were clear from those Gospels. What we receive each time in the Eucharist is the Body and Blood of Jesus. Secondly, we need to eat this bread in order to have life in Jesus Christ. Today, the Gospel of Mark teaches us about a good heart. We have often heard people saying “he has a good heart. She has a heart of gold.” So from a biblical stand-point, what does it mean to have a good heart, how can we develop a good heart and how does a good heart help both us and those around us in our lives?

The Pharisees, when they observed the disciples of Jesus, did not notice the good things that Jesus and his disciples were doing or the purity of His message. They noticed instead that the disciples were not washing their hands and following the Jewish rituals. They were rapid in making a critical

assessment not only of the disciples but also of Jesus himself. They say
“Why do your disciples not live according to the traditions?” sort of saying
“Jesus, why are you not teaching them properly?”

Jesus always took issue with the Pharisees because of their hypocrisy. For the Pharisees, it was **“Do as I say; but don’t do as I do.”** This is exactly the opposite of what we are advised to do by scripture. James in today’s second reading says “be doers of the word, not merely hearers who deceive yourselves.” But let us not be too quick to condemn the Pharisees. Maybe, I, you, we behave the same way often.

Some ten years ago, a flood of posters, tee shirts, arm and wrist bands that made a splash in Christian circles. **Each poster, banner or armband had the initials WWJD, WWJD an acronym for “What would Jesus do?”**

For example, what would Jesus do if he met this person whom I met today, what would Jesus do if he was asked this question that I am being asked today, what would Jesus do if he was in my situation today? The thought “What would Jesus do?” is a great tool that helps align our thoughts and my hearts towards the thoughts and heart of Jesus.

Was there any lack of coherence and balance between the heart of Jesus and the Law? Definitely not. Jesus observed the Law. He said “I did not come to abolish the Law; but to fulfill it.” The Law was what the Israelites were reminded to observe diligently in our first reading from Deuteronomy. But observance and practice of the law must above all be tempered with compassion, empathy and love. Because as Jesus said, the law of love dictates all the other ritualistic laws.

Thus to Jesus, people are always more important than rituals, the heart is more crucial than words uttered, what is inside a person more significant than the outward appearance and connecting with and assisting our fellow man infinitely more relevant than keeping ourselves far away from those who are different from us or harshly judging those who do not share our values. One of the significant points of the Ten Commandments, which are a summary of the Law, is that of the Ten Commandments, only the first three discuss our relationship with God. The others seven discuss our relationship with the people and the world around us. That is proof of how much, even the Law, gives importance to how we behave with people.

Two weeks ago, an interesting thing happened at my work place. Some of you know that I work as the Associate Director of Finance at the Archdiocese of Montreal. One of my responsibilities is to review the financial statements sent in by Parishes. I received a call from a man who had prepared the accounts of a Parish that I had assessed and he said that he had some further information that he wanted me to consider in revising the assessment. He came in on a Monday morning as agreed. He was a tall, lanky man, probably 6 feet 4 inches. He was casually dressed in jeans, a tee shirt, probably under dressed for office. We had a good meeting for an hour and then he left. As I walked him to the door, I had at least a couple of employees who work with me, say their eyebrows and ask me who he was. What had caught their attention was that he was not suitably dressed. What they did not know was that this man was vacationing with his wife in the Laurentians and he had generously interrupted his vacation, taken the time to come into town and prepare himself before coming to see me. Immediately after our meeting, he drove back out to continue his vacation in the Laurentians. What is more, he is a volunteer, one of the many that our church in Montreal is blessed with. **How quickly we judge; how easily we condemn.**

But the gospel is always Good News. The good news is this: The human heart was created by God, and just as it is capable of evil such as fornication, theft, murder, that are described in the Gospel, it is equally capable of good such as love, generosity, genuine appreciation . On Friday, this week, we celebrated the feast of **Augustine of Hippo**, one of the greatest doctors and theologians of the church. Augustine led an immoral life as a youth, gave up his Christian faith and for many years was almost the despair of his fervent mother, Saint Monica. But when God's grace touched him, he returned to the faith with great conviction and defended Christianity with all the power of his reasoning. In fact, it is **Augustine who was to write "Our hearts were made for you O Lord and they will never rest until they rest in you."**

If you believe that there is some work to be done before your heart thinks **like Jesus and who amongst us does not have ways to go in this regard, then 3 things can really help. Firstly, spend time with God daily.** Have some prayer time regularly even it is only a few minutes or even it is while you travel on the train or in the car. Secondly, **read scripture**, the Bible, the Word of God. It gives us an insight into the heart and mind of God. **Thirdly,**

reach out to those around you. Practice showing compassion, listen to people and care about them.

A heart that is pleasing to God is not necessarily a heart that does not have any evil thoughts or intentions. That would not be a human heart. A human heart that is pleasing to God is one like that of David, who is referred to in Scripture as a man after God's heart. David was not without sin, he was guilty of adultery with Bathsheba and had her husband Uriah killed to cover his sin. But when the prophet Nathan confronts him with his sin, he repents and begs for God's forgiveness and then gets up once again and goes on. **A human heart pleasing to God is one that is always striving to align itself to the will of God and ready to repent and ask for forgiveness, when it fails. A pleasing heart is one that thinks well of others and gives them the benefit of the doubt.** So, the next time you see a family walk into church really late, resist the temptation to give them the look or harbour harsh thoughts. Let your heart lead you to smile and be supportive. Who knows what that family went through just to get to church? The next time a child is being a child in church, making a few sounds; be charitable in your thoughts and actions towards that family.

So as we continue with our Eucharist today and when we leave after this Eucharist to go back into our world, let us carry back 2 questions to ponder over this week: Firstly, what is one thing that I can do to improve the health of my spiritual heart? Second, WWJD “What would Jesus do?” May the Good Lord bless us and make us a blessing as we strive to align our hearts to his in the coming week and for the rest of our lives. Amen.