

Lectionary Gospel Commentaries

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Based on the Lectionary Pericope Covering:

SOLA-LSB (Lutheran Service Book):
RCL (Revised Common Lectionary):

Mark 7:1-13

Year B - Proper 16, Text: Mark 7:1-13

Year B - Proper 17, Text: Mark 7:1-8, 14, 15, 21-23

Editor's Note: This commentary was made by using part of Wendt's commentary on Proper 17 from the RCL (Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23). The LSB/Sola lectionary splits this pericope into two parts: Proper 16 (Mark 7:1-13) and Proper 17 (Mark 7:14-23).

In Mark 7:1–23, Jesus attacks the narrow, legalistic, and extreme practices of the Pharisees in relation to purification (Verses 2–5), external worship (Verses 6–7), and observance of commandments. In doing this, Jesus defines the true moral intent of the divine law (Verses 8–13). However, He does more than merely contrast His Father's true law with the manner in which the Pharisees interpret it.

Verse 7:1: Some unfriendly Pharisees and scribes from Jerusalem gather around Jesus to spy on Him.

Verses 7:2–4: Some scholars point out that there are no references in the Jewish Talmuds (written AD 250–450) to the observance of the severe ritual requirements referred to in these verses. Some suggest that the rituals referred to were practiced in the Diaspora — by Jews living beyond the borders of the Holy Land.

However, there is every reason to believe that Mark was very familiar with the rabbinic practices and oral traditions of Jesus' day. He wrote only a few decades after Jesus completed His ministry — at a time when many who had been eyewitnesses and hearers of what Jesus did and said were still alive. Furthermore, he explains patiently and in detail (as if to non-Jews) what the practices of “the Jews” or “the Judeans” were. In the rabbinic mind, a trip to a public place could certainly bring defilement through proximity, and kitchen utensils did have to be immersed after use.

Verse 7:5: When some Pharisees confront Jesus about the fact that His disciples do not practice ritual washing prior to eating, Jesus responds that, although the Pharisees pay much attention to external ritual purity, they pay little or no attention to inner spiritual purity.

Jesus' challenge to the authority of oral law is in question when these scribal and Pharisaic heirs of “the ancients” (like-minded men of the previous two centuries) attack Him through His disciples. The Greek word translated as “live” in this verse means literally “walk”; it has links to the Hebrew verb *halak*, “to conduct one's life.”

Verses 7:6-7: This verse contains Jesus' first use of the term “hypocrite” in Mark's Gospel. In this verse, Mark quotes the Septuagint (Greek) translation of the Jewish scriptures, which offers a slightly different meaning from the Hebrew. However, Jesus' meaning remains clear, whichever translation is used.

Verse 7:8: It is dishonorable to substitute human precepts for divine teaching. Those who claim to be well informed concerning God's will set aside great religious matters and focus instead on minor issues that have to do with such things as crockery!

Verses 7:9-13: Here Jesus gives an example of how the clear commandment of God was made void by a special codicil added by the religious authorities.

The practice of designating part of one's assets as Corban (dedicated to God) was a kind of religious “tax-shelter” used to avoid having to use that money to take care of one's parents. Sorry Mom and Dad, my money is all tied up in future offerings to the temple!

