

## Why do your disciples ... eat with defiled hands?

Protectorate and finally, involuntarily, by becoming a Roman possession. Part of the Palestinian land was diverted to benefit the Romans. For example, Mark Anthony gave his famous paramour, Cleopatra, the assets from a large portion of Palestinian timberland. Mark even humbled her great enemy, King Herod the Great, by requiring him to be custodian of the property. Herod had to see to collecting and sending the forest's revenues to the Egyptian queen

### The 'AM-HA-'ARETS

The second group, the '*am-ha-'arets*, (*the people of the land*), took many of the 613 commandments lightly. They kept the 10 Commandments and a few more, but not much else. nor did it seem necessary for them to learn the laws. The Pharisees claimed that it was not worth teaching them the law because they were already damned.

### WHAT IS CHRIST DOING?

Today Christ challenges part of the *haberim* doctrines as interpreted by the Pharisees. The first two emphasized passages speak to non-Biblical mandates:

- 1) some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them
- 2) You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition.'

Our Lord's stated reply marked 3) is a moral warning for all of us:

- 3) there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile.'

The issue here of course is not bacteria. It is rather that a Pharisee or some other scrupulously observant soul feared he/she might have accidentally touched something *ritually* impure. The hand washing was merely a human tradition to remove possible ritual impurity. Jesus then reminds us of the source of impurity. Impurity comes from inside us.

**Please prepare Saint Mark 7:24-37 for next Sunday**

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### **Avarice**

Engraving

From *The Seven Deadly Sins*

Pieter Bruegel the Elder, Dutch Artist

c. 1525 - 1569

## Today's Gospel: Saint Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

✠ NOW WHEN THE PHARISEES AND SOME OF THE SCRIBES who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, they noticed that **1) some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them.** (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders; and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it; and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles.) So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, 'Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?' He said to

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them, 'Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written, "This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines." 2) **You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition.**' Then he called the crowd again and said to them, 'Listen to me, all of you, and understand: 3) **there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile.**' For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.' [© NRSV]

### Divisions

Most will recall that Judaism was divided into groups of political/religious parties, Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Zealots, etc., but one of the divisions that is usually forgotten is the more basic one between the *haberim* (*associates*) and the *'am-ha-'arets*, (*the people of the land*). The *haberim* kept the law of God, the *'am-ha-'arets* did not. The two groups hated each other with a passion.

Jesus and the Twelve were undoubtedly members of the *haberim*; otherwise, they would have been shunned and unable to minister. Many, if not most, of Jesus' followers would have been *'am-ha-'arets* like the tax gatherers and others who avoided the law.

#### The HABERIM:

The first group, the *haberim* were Jews who swore that they would follow all of the 613 laws of the Scriptures; To become a *associate* one had to swear religious loyalty before 3 other current members. Jesus and the 12 were loyal Jews. The Eucharist is believed to begun at a periodically held *haberim* dinner to which Jesus added his Spiritual Presence, saying *Do this...* The group that has come down to us a the most observant were the Pharisees who went even further than typical *associates*, promising that they would follow the oral

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law that stemmed from centuries of Biblical interpretation. They got their start during the time of the Maccabees, 167 years before Christ's birth. The Jews had revolted against the rule of the Seleucids, and took over Palestine after the death of Alexander the Great (died 323 BC).

The Seleucid King, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, pursued a *Hellenizing* policy with zeal. This effectively meant

**Coin of Antiochus IV Epiphanes.**  
The Greek inscription reads  
*Antiochus, image of God, bearer of victory*



trying to supplant the Jewish culture with the Greek.

Traditional Jewish religious observance was outlawed: In 167 BC Jewish sacrifices were forbidden, Sabbaths and feasts were banned and circumcision was made illegal. Altars to Greek gods were set up and animals prohibited to Jews were sacrificed on them, *including pigs!* The Olympian Zeus was placed on the altar of the Temple and the possession of Jewish Scriptures was made a capital offense. In their endeavor to eliminate Judaism the foreign invaders even opened gymnasiums for athletic contests. *Gymnasium* means *exercise in the nude*, anathema to the Jews. How far can you push devout people? The most pious of them continued to follow the laws of God and some died for their Faith. Many of those who did keep the Faith were the founders of the aforementioned Pharisees. The term *Pharisee* means *separated*.

In 166 BC faithful Jews rose up and expelled the invaders. A new Jewish Kingdom was set up but soon lost its way first through infighting; next, by asking to be a Roman