

**TWENTY SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (8/30-31/2009)**

*Deuteronomy 4/1-8, Psalm 15, James 1/17-27, Mark 7/1-23*

Flipping through the cable TV recently, I came across a little drama that was taking place on a beach in Australia.

The senior lifeguard was trying to warn a bather that he shouldn't go out into the water because there was a fleet of poisonous jelly fish just off the shore.

He couldn't get through to the determined swimmer because the man didn't speak English.

The guard made all kinds of non-verbal signs, but to no avail, but finally after about ten minutes, the bather seemed to get the message and moved reluctantly down the beach.

When I was reading today's Gospel passage detailing a run-in Jesus had with the Pharisees, I felt like déjà vu all over again.

Jesus and the Pharisees don't seem to be speaking the same language.

The Pharisees are interested in the external observance of the Law, like Moses ordered in the first reading from Deuteronomy today.

With inexorable logic, they seemed to feel that a person's outward observance of the Law accurately reflected his or her inward compliance.

Jesus came at it from a different point of view.

He saw that many of the regulations that had grown up around the Law were of human origin, and subject therefore to human frailty in interpretation.

The Pharisees were treating these human understandings as if they were from the very mouth of God Himself.

Jesus respected the Law, but sensibly recognized it was being interpreted by human beings and therefore allowed of exceptions and reasonable approaches.

In the recent hearings conducted by congress with the Supreme Court nominee, Sonia Sotomayor, a major issue was made about her interpretations of the law.

Some congressmen and women felt she would be too loose and allow her "feelings" to help dictate her legal responses.

She of course denied this, but everyone knows that our "feelings" and "emotions" do enter into everything we do, even when interpreting the Constitution of the USA.

We are human, and, at the same time, bound to observe the law in a reasonable way.

Jesus points out what the problem really is: Nothing that enters into a person can make him or her impure; that which comes out of them and only that constitutes impurity.

While outward observance is important, our inward dispositions, the way we really feel and think, are far more important.

Those inner realities do initiate our outer actions.

In the end, Jesus and the Pharisees may not have been as far apart as they seemed to be.

The Pharisees stressed the outward, and Jesus championed the inward.

Sometimes it's a balancing act, but, at the same time, Jesus speaks the full truth.

Our spirit of faith, deep within the core of our being, will determine how we live our lives.