

Let's begin by defining a couple words: defilement and sanctification. These words are opposites. Defilement is when someone is made unclean and unholy. Sanctification is when someone is made holy. Whether we are defiled or sanctified is of utmost importance for how God regards us. If we are defiled, then we are unacceptable before God. It's like having something rotten in your home. It stinks. Put that stuff outside. It doesn't belong in the house. That is how we are before God when we are defiled.

Being sanctified is the opposite. When we are holy, we belong with God. One of the ways that the Bible talks about holiness is by being properly dressed. When we are properly dressed we have no need to be ashamed. If we were found in our underwear, or naked, we would be ashamed. But when we are properly clothed we are acceptable. We can be seen. So it is for those who are holy.

Defilement describes a state of being where we have no business being together with God.

Sanctification describes a state of being where we belong together with God.

Understanding defilement and sanctification is essential for understanding the religion that God gave to the Israelites at Mt. Sinai in the Old Testament. God wanted the Israelites to be holy so that they could be with him and he could be with them. To make the Israelites holy God instituted many laws, rituals, and practices. Moses wrote these down in Exodus, and, especially, in Leviticus. The entirety of Leviticus is God's instructions for avoiding defilement and what is to be done if someone has become defiled.

One of the regulations that God gave at that time was about clean and unclean foods. Clean food could be eaten without defilement. Unclean foods would defile the eater. For example, beef and lamb could be eaten. Pork, shellfish, and several other animals would defile the eater. We won't get into the whys and wherefores of this. You can read about that yourself in Leviticus 11. What I'd like to point out is that according to the laws God gave to the Israelites, there was such a thing as unclean food that would defile the Israelites if they ate it.

This is important background information for our Gospel reading. For the nearly 1,500 years, from Moses to Jesus, the Jews observed the distinction between clean and unclean food. But then in our Gospel reading Jesus says: **"Hear me, all of you, and understand: There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him."**

Let's apply Jesus's words to unclean food. Unclean food is something from outside. It defiles. Is Jesus rejecting the distinction between clean and unclean food? Yes, he is. Jesus is even clearer, later, with his disciples when they asked him to explain himself. He said, **"Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?"** (Thus Jesus declared all foods clean.) Jesus said, **"All foods are clean."**

There seems to be an obvious contradiction between what Leviticus 11 says and what Jesus says in our Gospel reading. Leviticus 11 says that there are several foods that will defile you. Jesus says, **"Nothing from the outside can defile a person. What defiles a person is what goes out from a person."** The Pharisees and scribes—always quick to point out any faults they find with Jesus or with his

disciples—thought that Jesus was taking away from what God had commanded. We heard in our first reading that nothing should be added or taken away from what God has said.

But instead of thinking that Jesus is contradicting the Scriptures or taking something away, it might be helpful to think of what he is doing as *fulfilling* the Scriptures. The Law that God gave to the Israelites at Mt. Sinai was binding for a time, but that was not meant to be an arrangement that would last for all time. Something new would take its place. This was, in fact, already prophesied at that time.

In Deuteronomy 18, which is at the same time as Mt. Sinai, Moses speaks of a mysterious Someone who is to come, who will be like him, but even greater. Moses calls this one the “prophet.” He says, “**The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brother Israelites. Listen to him.**” Jesus is the fulfillment of this prophecy. Moses says, “**Listen to him.**” The people had listened to Moses. Now we should listen to this Prophet. Moses says so. So if Jesus declares that all foods are clean, then we should believe all foods are clean. Jesus is Lord.

In order to do this, however, you must understand who Jesus is. You must correctly identify him as the prophet spoken of by Moses. The problem with the scribes and Pharisees was that they didn’t believe, or didn’t want to believe, that Jesus is this prophet. They didn’t want to listen to him even though Moses told them that they should. Because they didn’t want to believe that Jesus is Lord, having authority over all things in heaven and on earth, they instead saw him as an enemy. They thought that he was contradicting Moses, taking away from Scripture, leading people astray. They became convinced that they would be doing God a favor if they got rid of him, and eventually they crucified him.

This question, of who Jesus is, is important and highly consequential for every human being—not just for those scribes and Pharisees. We know what they thought of Jesus. What do *you* say about Jesus? Your answer is of eternal significance. The Catechism teaches us the correct answer for what we should say about Jesus. It says, “I believe that Jesus Christ is my Lord.” That is the shortest creed in Christendom. What does it mean to be a Christian? Being a Christian is believing that Jesus Christ is your Lord.

When it comes to what we’ve been talking about today—defilement and sanctification—Jesus being your Lord makes all the difference. The Catechism goes on to describe Jesus’s lordship, what he does as my Lord: “I believe that Jesus Christ is my Lord who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with his holy, precious blood and his innocent suffering and death.”

You can hear defilement language and sanctification language in that description of Jesus’s lordship. We hear defilement language when we are spoken of as lost and condemned persons. We are defiled by what is in us and what comes out of us. It is as Jesus says in our Gospel reading, “**What comes out of a person defiles him... From the heart comes evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.**”

Does what Jesus says describe you? Do you have evil thoughts? Are you guilty of sexual immorality, which in the Greek is *porneia*, which is where we get the word pornography? Do you covet? Do you lie?

Do you gossip? I, unfortunately, have done these things and more, which means that I am a lost and condemned person. As far as how I am in myself I am defiled and have no business being together with God. I should be swept out and put with the rest of the trash.

But there is sanctification language too—the opposite of defilement. The Catechism says that Jesus has redeemed me—a wonderful word! I am redeemed! I have been purchased. I have been won—not with gold or silver, but with the holy, precious blood and the innocent suffering and death of my Lord and your Lord. The sacrifice of this Lamb of God has brought about an eternal redemption so that all who trust in him will be clothed with holiness so as to live together with God.

In conclusion, defilement and sanctification might not be the most common words. But whether we are defiled or sanctified is of eternal significance. Whether we are defiled or sanctified determines our relationship with God. When we are living in sin and unbelief, we are defiled. When we call out to Jesus in faith and say, “Have mercy on me, a sinner,” we are sanctified.

The stakes have been raised, so to speak, from what was given at Mt. Sinai. Jesus reveals that our defilement is much deeper than we would otherwise think or imagine. It goes all the way down into our heart, the core of our being. But the remedy is also deeper. God has sent his Son to be the Lord who redeems us.

Jesus is the one about whom Moses prophesied. We should listen to him. What he has to say is not bad for us sinners, but good and life giving. As Jesus himself says, “**I have not come in order to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through me.**” Listen to him.