

This year Mr Clean is 61 years old.

And he doesn't seem to have changed one bit. He started out bald with gray eyebrows; very buff in his clean T-shirt and complete with an earring. What man, other than movie pirates, wore earrings back in 1958? After 61 years, he hasn't changed.

Not only has his appearance remained constant but so has his posture and advice. He still stands there, arms crossed, telling housewives how to clean up whatever mess confronts them. He promises to get rid of all the germs and dirt and anything else lurking in the way of a perfectly clean kitchen.

Ever wonder how we could bring Mr. Clean up to date? Perhaps a tattoo or a few day old beard would help. I think that by now he should need glasses: either to see the dirt or to read all of the precautions and directions on the labels. Perhaps Mr Clean should be helping a man clean up the results of a messy child. Even better would be recasting his image from an advice giving he-man into something more along the lines of a household helper. Really! We have all of the advice we need, what we really need is someone to pitch in and do some work!

What hasn't changed after all these years is that houses get as messy today as they did 61 years ago. There is still dirt and dust, food stains and pet hair, invisible germs and bacteria all that need to be cleaned.

What hasn't changed in 2000 years is that we ourselves still get as messy as ever. I'm not thinking about all of the new activities that challenge laundry detergent and bath soap. I'm thinking about that invisible dirt that hides within our souls, within our culture, even within our churches. It too needs to get cleaned up.

Timothy faced a challenge within his congregation in the verses that precede today's reading. There were those who were following false teachings, ones contrary to those of Jesus. These people enjoyed creating controversy which in turn produced envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions and constant friction. Further, they believed that godliness produced wealth; monetary wealth for themselves.

While there are those people in most any organization who do enjoy creating controversy and might actually enjoy these negative results, perhaps seeking greater influence due to the confusion and discord that they cause, there is no place for them in a Timothy's congregation, moreover any congregation that desires to follow the teachings of Jesus. While there are times when cleaning out trouble makers is appropriate, please note carefully that the advice that Paul is about to give to the

young pastor, Timothy. His advice does not focus upon how to clean up the church by running these folks out of town. Rather the focus is upon a thorough cleaning of Timothy, how he behaves and the example that he sets. Clearly, as pastor, some of the dissension and strife was directed at Timothy; even more so since it was his responsibility to counter the false teachings.

Paul started with an emphasis on simplicity and contentment.

Currently the biggest change to household cleaning is to not clean it, get rid of it! The Marie Kondo approach is to get rid of all of those things that you have acquired that no longer bring you pleasure. Yes, thank that letter jacket for the joy it has brought you, recognize that it will never fit again, acknowledge the holes in that would keep you from wearing it even if it did fit, and get it out of the house.

Paul's advice takes us in a slightly different direction when it comes time to clean out our individual and collective lives. Compared to Marie Kondo, most of what we need to clean out never really did bring us joy. Perhaps there were moments of pleasure or at least a hope that there would be some pleasure. But that is far different than joy.

Pleasure is considered to be something external and temporary; something that provides individual gratification. For example, a good meal can give you pleasure as can an engrossing movie or a good football game (if the correct team wins!). Excessive alcohol and drugs, gambling, and multiple other activities can also provide momentary pleasure yet the fleeting nature of such pleasure becomes very apparent in the days that follow: physical ailments, guilt, wasted time and opportunities. By comparison, joy is an emotion that comes from within, that is focused on deep relationships, that provides lasting contentment.

Paul's advice is to pursue that which brings true joy: righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. They bring lasting joy to our lives. All of the other things that we chase after are fleeting. If we have food and clothes, then we have enough. Merely having more, as Paul comes back to, is not wrong by itself. However, here we can agree with Ms. Kondo: simplicity is important, excess merely reflects past pleasures, temporary feelings. Paul goes much further: the love of money with which to acquire all of the excesses of modern life, the clutter Ms Kondo recommends removing, is itself a root of all kinds of evil. I find it interesting that we have greatly expanded this scriptural saying to state that money is the root of all evil. Not so! It is the love of money which is wrong and that love is but a, one, and not the only, single root of all kinds of evil, but not all evil.

As we strive to clean our spiritual homes, we do not thank the dirt, the pleasures that bring us

false joy, as we clean them out, rather we thank Christ who set the example, who through his absolute cleanliness was able to stand before Pontius Pilate and the world without fear of exposure, secure in the joy of being obedient to God the Father. We also thank Christ for our ability to see our stains and dirt and dust that clog our lives and souls in a different way, as things to be cleaned rather than hoarded, removed rather than sought after. And we thank Jesus for the power to be able to clean them.

Unlike household cleaning, we do not take our imperfections to the local thrift shop. Every few months I start another round of getting rid of things. Most of these things do have some useful life left in them. Having multiple, partial sets of favorite dishes merely clutters the basement storage room. Hopefully someone who finds them at Goodwill can use them. But envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, constant friction and the like are toxic; they need to be carefully disposed of in such a way that they do not spread.

That disposal must start with ourselves. We are not told to join in the fray, to further the friction, to counter evil with more evil. Rather, we dispose of such toxic products by focusing upon Jesus, the teachings and example of Jesus. We are to clearly stand out as an example of love and forgiveness and obedience to God, attributes that not only protect us but also detoxifies the envy and dissension and friction so that they do not spread.

Paul now returns to those that do have wealth. He is not against those who are rich nor does he condemn wealth. However, he does offer two critical thoughts: 1) the love of money is the issue 2) what we do with our wealth is critical. There are many ways in which to generate personal wealth, ways that Paul would find acceptable. However, as our culture places an inordinate priority on wealth, many sacrifice far too much in its pursuit: family and other relationships, ethical principles, personal gains at the cost of others or even society at large. For those with wealth (be it money or talents or time or opportunities) comes the responsibility to use it wisely, let it help those who are in need. Simply put, share what you have to bring lasting joy to yourself and those around you.

Paul's recommended cleaning transformation is neither superficial nor easy. It does require help; significant help. It affects all areas of our lives from how we seek joy to how we differentiate what is enough from that which is excessive and causes us to fall in love with our pursuit of money.

Imagine how different Mr. Clean would be if he followed Paul's advice and lived a life based on the teachings of Jesus. Or imagine Jesus as Mr. Clean. No, I don't think that Jesus was bald and wore an earring and a sparkling white T-shirt.

- Jesus does not merely offer advice nor just stand back with his arms crossed, watching as we toil

away.

- Jesus has never become outdated nor become compromised by current culture.
- Jesus works best on that which can not be seen; that which is the very core of our beings and our communities of faith.
- Jesus is the one who does the work, not us. It is through our faith, through the true joy that we find as we enter into an ever deeper relationship with Jesus, that we discover that the presence of Christ within us drives out the envy and slander and evil suspicions and constant friction and replaces it with love and steadfastness and gentleness.

May such attributes as these define us and reflect to all of the world the true meaning of what it means to follow the teachings of Christ.