

Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time C - Our Lord, through his grace, works that brokenness into something that gradually takes shape from here to eternity

February 27, 2022.

This is the Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time and is celebrated because Lent is late this year. This Sunday's readings remind us that if we truly want to recognize, do, and praise the good that we and others do, we need Our Lord's help and to have the wisdom not to judge a book by its cover.

Today's First Reading (Sirach 27:4-7) teaches us that the true worth of anyone involves a trial by fire that shakes us up and makes us show who we really are and how we live. Sirach focuses on one's words being the accurate measurement of one's faults or virtue. Appearances are not enough. He gives three examples of a process for evaluating the worth of a "fruit." With the sieve, the undesirable remains in the sieve and the desirable passes through. With the firing of pottery, it adopts its definitive form and strength, or its definitive deformation and flaws. With cultivating a fruit tree, a good tree bears good and abundant fruit or a withered tree with little to no fruit. In all three processes, it is the result that matters. The process doesn't automatically produce a good or bad outcome, so people aren't automatically good or evil.

In the Book of Jeremiah in the Old Testament, God told Jeremiah to go to a potter's house to watch the potter make clay pots. As Jeremiah watched the potter molding and fixing the clay, he noticed : **"The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him."** After Jeremiah saw this object lesson, God gave him a message for Israel: **"Can I not do with you, O house of Israel, just as this potter has done? says the Lord. Just like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel."** (Jeremiah 18:4-6).

I remember that we registered our kids for simple clay building class. Once the clay is prepared and shaped, it was placed into a kiln to harden and be complete. If there are any flaws in the shaping of the object, the kiln makes that deformation permanent. A kiln is a good metaphor for the trials by fire that we undergo in life. Trials define us for good or for ill. They never leave us the same. Trials are also the moment where we indeed show what we are made of. A trial can lead to growth or destruction. It all depends on the virtue and grace with which we face it. Original Sin and our sins have defined us, but **Paul reminds us today (1 Corinthians 15:54-58), that Our Lord, through his grace, works that brokenness into something that gradually takes shape from here to eternity: a saint.** Paul says that it is thanks to Our Lord that this process of telling good from evil, even among the well-intentioned, is not in vain. Our corruptibility and mortality due to Original Sin would lead to spiritual as well as physical death if left to their own devices. Original Sin disfigured us but also disfigured our view of good and evil. We need help to correct it. Paul encourages us to see that Our Lord will clothe that corruptibility with incorruptibility: the grace that transforms us and heals us from the wounds of Original Sin. Although we still are subjected to weakness and temptation in this life, in eternity we will be purified of it, once and for all. Our Lord clothes our mortality with immortality by sowing the seed of eternal life in us from the moment we believe and are baptized. His victory over death swallowed it up for himself and us. If we persevere in Christ, we will share in his victory over sin and death.

In the Gospel reading Luke (6:39-45) is full of word of truth from Jesus. **1. "Can a blind man act as a guide to a blind man. Will they not both fall into a ditch?"** This is true in every aspect of life, but particularly in the Church. People cannot teach until they have learned. In the Catholic Church we are blessed with a teaching authority, the Magisterium, Latin word for teacher. The magisterium consists of the Pope, the Bishops, theologians and consultants. Their duty is to

set the course for us to relate our faith and morals to the evolving times. We take this for granted because most of us have always been Catholic and have always had the body of our faith presented in a rather neat package. But dogmatic statements didn't just happen. They evolved over many centuries as the Church continues to grow in its understanding of itself. The magisterium does not just exist among the hierarchy. It also exists in the home among the confirmed. Those who have received the sacrament of confirmation have received the gift of the Holy Spirit to grow in their understanding of the faith. When at times we have doubt or difficulty understanding what we believe or why we believe, we have to go to books and knowledgeable people in the area. We also have to bend our knees and pray to the Holy Spirit to help us grow in faith. The blind cannot lead the blind. That is why we have been gifted with the Holy Spirit. That is why we have the magisterium.

2. "Why look at the speck in your brother's eye when you miss the plank in your own?" From time to time, we tend to transfer our irritation over our own failings to others. So we decry another person's faults as a way of hiding our own. The Lord was quite a psychologist when he said, **"First deal with your own faults."** Some days when everything other people do irritates us, we have to take a step back and consider what we are doing that upsets others, and, even more, what we are doing that upsets ourselves.

3. "A good tree does not produce decayed fruit anymore than a decayed tree produces good fruit. Each tree is known by its yield." When a person does good things, we know this is a good person. When a person is continually stirring up trouble, we know that this person is troubled. The action reveals the person. In the same way, it is not enough for us to say we are saved and then live as pagans. In fact, it is not enough to say we are saved. What we need to say is that we are in the process of being saved. Our actions must reflect God's gift to us. If they don't, then we are in fact rejecting his salvation. Yes, we always depend upon the mercy of God, but we have to respond to this mercy by doing our best to live the Christian life. If we don't then our fruits, our actions will demonstrate the insincerity of our conversion.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we may have really made a mess of our life. Our "pot" is scarred from poor decisions that we made and things that were done to us. As a result, our life has not turned out as we intended. But we are the clay; we're not the potter. God is the potter, and he doesn't discard misshapen clay that's been done by circumstances. He doesn't waste the pain that we've been through. Jesus was never in the judgement business. He used words to heal, restore and to bring back life, joy and hope. ***My Jesus, I come before you in this time of prayer to reflect on your word and what it means for me personally. As I spend this time of prayer with you, I bring to you all those areas of my life that need your healing touch because it is you in whom I believe. It is you in whom I hope. It is you whom I love. Lord, Jesus, I ask you to deepen my faith in your presence in my life and my belief in all you teach through your holy Church. Help me grow in trust where I struggle to surrender to your love, and deepen my trust in your loving providence for every circumstance in my life. Lord, I ask to know your love for me experientially as well as intellectually so that my love for you may grow stronger and deeper. Amen***

The coming Wednesday is Ash Wednesday and Lent begins. I need this Lent. Perhaps you do too. Lent is a time for us to grow in our faith life, let the magisterium and Holy Spirit guide us. Lent is a time for us to look into ourselves. How is the upset we have with others a reflection of our own faults? Lent is a time to consider the way we live our Christian life. Do our actions demonstrate Christ's continuing conversion in our lives? May you and I allow God to take control of every aspect of our lives.