

## 8<sup>th</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time Year C

Sir 27:4-7

Ps 92:2-3, 13-14, 15-16

1 Cor 15:54-58

Lk 6:39-45

We have been fortunate to have heard from most of the Sermon on the Plain from the Gospel of Luke (Ch. 6). Today's Gospel reading concludes the Sermon for our Sunday readings. If you recall two weeks ago Jesus was preaching about the Beatitudes and the woes. Blessed are you if you do this (something virtuous); or woe to you if you do that (something selfish). Last week's preaching by Jesus was even more challenging: love your enemies, pray for those who mistreat you, offer a blessing instead of seeking revenge.

The message of Jesus in today's Gospel is just as challenging. "Can a blind person guide a blind person?" This seems rather simple – the answer is obviously "no". Both will fall into a pit, because the blind guide cannot see the danger that lies ahead. In this case, Jesus is talking about spiritual blindness. Somebody that has little or no spiritual knowledge cannot, and should not, guide others in the spiritual life. If he or she tries to do so, that person will lead others down the wrong path and into harm. Souls are at stake, and so we don't want to take a chance on being led down a path that is a dead end.

Jesus then mentions that "No disciple is superior to the teacher; but when fully trained, every disciple will be like his teacher." We know that it is the teaching of the Church, and we have heard it said many times that, "As disciples of Christ we are called to be like Him." God the Father sent His Son Jesus to teach us the ways of the Kingdom. It is by listening to Jesus (Transfiguration – "Listen to Him"), and putting into practice what He teaches us (rock or sand foundation), that we become more like Jesus Himself. We behave, think, and have feelings like Jesus in every aspect of our lives. The more that we learn from Jesus, and the more that we put His teachings into practice, the more that we will be like Jesus. This is the hope of God the Father, and Jesus Himself.

So, the final teaching today of the Sermon on the Plain is about the words that we use. Jesus is saying that the words that we use give evidence of what kind of heart we have. This is connected to what we heard last Sunday in which Jesus said to "stop condemning, or else you will be condemned." Today we hear how we shouldn't point out the splinter in another person's eye when we don't notice the wooden beam in our own eye. It is far too easy to judge others. We can easily point out the faults of others. "This person does this wrong, . . . and this wrong, and that wrong." We can spend a lot of time complaining about others. Yet, how often do we commit the same errors? How many times do we have the same bad habits? All too often we miss, or ignore, our own faults.

So, how have we cultivated our hearts? This sounds funny, doesn't it? To cultivate our hearts. Yet, Jesus gave us the parable of the Sower and the Seeds – some seed fell on the path, rocky ground, amongst thorns, or on good soil. The seed is the word of God, and the soil is the condition of our hearts. God's word (seed) will only take root in our hearts if we have prepared them to receive His word. The good news is that we are given the ability to decide which kind of soil we want to have. If we spend our time complaining about others, unhappy with our lives, only seeing the negative and rarely if ever the positive, then we will be cultivating our hearts with bad soil. Bad soil does not produce good fruit. Bad soil will only produce weeds and thorn bushes. As Jesus said this will manifest itself in the words that come out of our mouths – such as criticism, complaints, insults, and sarcasm.

On the other hand, if we spend our time meditating on the word of God, praying, doing acts of charity for others, trying our best to remain positive, then we will be cultivating our hearts with good soil. Good soil will produce good fruit. It will have an effect on our words, which will tend to be more positive, encouraging, complimentary, and being grateful. Jesus said, "A good person out of the store of

goodness in his heart produces good, but an evil person out of a store of evil produces evil; for from the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks.”

Jesus uses words of good and evil here – black and white. However, we know that there are many shades of gray in between. A person does not have to be evil to say unkind things. What has happened in our life that has caused us to be prone to say unkind things? What has happened in our life that has caused us to be sarcastic or cynical? What has happened in our life to cause us to point out the faults of others so easily, rather than look for the good in them? It really depends on how we have let our hearts be cultivated in which we will answer these questions.

Lent starts this Wednesday. Lent is an excellent opportunity to allow Jesus to uproot the weeds in our hearts, and to allow Jesus to cultivate our hearts to be prepared to receive His word. I strongly encourage spending some time this Lent asking Jesus to help us in the cultivation of our hearts. It will not be the blind leading the blind. It will be the divine Teacher, who is also the Light of the world, showing us the way to holiness and salvation. As we heard in the second reading St. Paul exhorted his fellow Christians, “Therefore, my beloved brothers and sisters, be firm, steadfast, always fully devoted to the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.” If we will be firm and steadfast in our Lenten devotions then they will not be in vain. Jesus will guarantee that our efforts will produce good fruit, and the storehouse of our hearts will be filled with the goodness of God.