

HOMILY for 8th SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year C

This Sunday's Gospel tells us that a blind should not be the guide for a blind. As I reflect on that message, I'm reminded of this cute story that I'd like to share with you.

This old rancher in Montana hates wearing a seat belt. One day he's driving on the highway with his wife & sees a state patrol car behind him. He says to his wife, "Quick, dear, take the wheel! I gotta put my seat belt on!" So she does, & right then the patrolman pulls them over.

He walks up to the car & says to the rancher, "Say, I noticed you weren't wearing your seat belt."

The rancher says, "I was too, but you don't have to take my word for it. My wife here is a good Christian woman, ask her. She'll tell you the truth. She doesn't lie about anything."

The cop says to the wife, "So? How about it, madam?"

And the wife says, "I've been married to Buck for twenty years, officer, and one thing I've learned in all that time is this: You never argue with him when he's drunk."

Anyway, we all have our faults & shortcomings. Unfortunately, we often don't remember that or have enough humility to admit that truth. We quickly condemn others or cast judgments on people who might have gone down the wrong path. Instead of taking time to help them find the way back to God, we push them further away from the Kingdom of God with our condemnation. We run out of patience & mercy to reach out & welcome back the lost sheep. By doing that, we could have misled them & failed to continue the mission that Jesus has left behind for us. It is that concern that Jesus wants to address & tell us about in this Sunday's Gospel. That is why Jesus poses this question to us, "Can a blind man act as a guide to a blind man? Will they not both fall into a ditch?"

I don't know if you've ever had an eyesight problem or known someone suffer from blindness. When I was a chaplain at Grand Rapids Home for Veterans, I knew a veteran who was completely blind; he had a tough time getting around & had to ask the staff there to take him from one place to another. He had a bad habit of smoking & wanted to go outside for a few puffs several times a day. I used to help take him outside in the wheel chair for that habit every day while giving thanks to God for my good eyesight. I can only imagine how my life would be like if I were blind. I would sure run into others & hurt people around me including myself. That is one of the problems with being blind. We don't know where we're going; & we certainly cannot guide anyone.

It's not by accident that Jesus chooses the image of blindness to caution us as His disciples & gives us a personal lesson about spiritual journey. He does not want us to act like a blind & be self-righteous in judging others, especially sinners. That's why He says, "Can a blind man act as a guide to another blind man? Will they not both fall into a ditch? ...Why look at the speck in your brother's eye when you miss the plank in your own? How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me remove the speck from your eye,' yet fail yourself to see the plank lodged in your own? Hypocrite, remove the plank from your own eye first; then you will see clearly enough to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

As you might recall from your knowledge of the Bible, some people back then liked to judge & condemn others, especially sinners. We've heard many times in the Bible how religious leaders despised tax collectors & stoned to death anyone who committed adultery. They

judged people who did not strictly observe religious laws & rituals. They looked down on anyone who violated the law of Sabbath Day or strayed away from the faithful life of a good Jew. But, they're not the only ones who acted in that self-righteous way. Some people of our time like to quote religious rules to judge & condemn people. For example, we've seen some Catholic leaders threaten to take away high-profile, abortion supporting Catholics their ability to receive Communion or their association with the Catholic Church. Or, some priests would not perform a wedding, baptism, or other sacraments if someone does not fulfill certain Church rule. It is this judging & condemning attitude that Jesus warns us about in today's Gospel & wants us to avoid. For, at the end of the day, we're all sinners, including the Pope. We need to look up to our Lord Jesus to ask for guidance & mercy. Otherwise, we would be like a blind leading a blind as we try to tell other sinful people on what to do.

We've heard the saying, "The eyes are the windows to the soul of a person." That general wisdom reminds us that we can tell what's going on in one's heart by looking into the eyes of a person. That's why our current president Joe Biden once said, "I've looked into the eyes of Putin, president of Russia; & I know that he is a killer." The president is right on as we've seen what Putin is doing right now in Ukraine. But, evidently this Sunday's Readings can show us other ways to know about a person. Today's First Reading shows us another way to figure out someone besides looking into his/her eyes. The Book of Sirach says, "When a sieve is shaken, the husks appear; so do a man's faults when he speaks... so in his conversation is the test of a man... so too does a man's speech disclose the bent of his mind. Praise no man before he speaks; for it is then that men are tested." In other words, we use a sieve to separate the husk from other useful products. Like a sieve, a conversation is another way for us to tell what's truly in the heart of a person. When someone speaks, he/she discloses everything in his/her heart along with his/her faults. That's why we have this saying, "Feel free to speak up & pour your heart out" as we try to encourage someone to share with us what is in his/her heart & mind by speaking out.

But, there's one more way that Jesus wants to offer us in today's Gospel to figure out one's true character. He says, "...A good tree does not produce decayed fruit any more than a decayed tree produces good fruit. Each tree is known by its yield... A good man produces goodness from the good in his heart; an evil man produces evil out of his store of evil." So, Jesus thinks that the best way to see one's true character is not through one's eyes, or one's speech. Rather, it's through one's actions. An evil person who stores evil intentions in one's heart & mind will produce evil actions. On the other hand, a good person who always has good intentions in one's conscience will do the right things & act as his/her God would. Jesus assures us that we can see right at one's heart & soul by looking at one's actions & lifestyle. An evil person cannot hide behind a few nice things that he/she does & fool everyone for long.

My dear brothers & sisters, evil & darkness is all around us. Nothing good would ever come out of it. We should not let it tempt us & fool us. We should resist & stand up against it. Moreover, we must call on Jesus to lead us & commit ourselves to follow His way of goodness. That way, we will not ever fall into a ditch or mislead anyone. Here are St. Paul's encouragement in today's Second Reading for us to stay on that path. He says, "...Be steadfast & persevering, my beloved brothers & sisters, fully engaged in the work of the Lord." That's how we can set a good example for others & will not mislead anyone.