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March 2, 2019

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## **Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

[March 3, 2019](#)

Sirach 27:4-7

Psalms 92

1 Corinthians 15:54-58

Luke 6:39-45

It seems to me that we often tend to hear the Gospel too piously. I don't mean that we shouldn't take it seriously, but Jesus had a great sense of humor and we tend to suffocate it with overly solemn renderings of his preaching.

When I picture a scene in which Jesus preached today's Gospel, I wonder if he might have blindfolded a couple of kids to illustrate his point. He could have given them a few dizzying turns and then invited them to amble down a narrow path alongside a canal. With nothing to hold on to but one another, they were well-assured of tripping or taking a quick dunk — not too unlike Matthew's story of Peter's performance as he walked the waves toward Jesus.

If folks didn't get the point with the first picture, it was impossible to miss the idea when the carpenter's son drew an example from his dad's workshop, suggesting that somebody who had a roof beam protruding from his eye would have a hard time helping a companion who suffered from a speck of sawdust in his own. (A humorous catechetical variation on this might be to challenge a young person to hold the largest exercise ball he or she can manage and to take a marble from the hand of another child without dropping the ball.)

A significant element of Jesus' teaching technique was to make people laugh — at themselves and at the pretentiousness of folks who tried to awe them with highfalutin concepts and impossible legalisms. His parables were multilayered riddles designed to entice his audience into seeing things differently — over and over again.

When we head down the path that Jesus opens with this little example, we find ourselves in puzzling ambiguity. We get the urge to ask: "If I am blind, how do I know whether or not the person guiding me is blind or sighted? If someone really wants to lead me, is she or he likely to admit to blindness?"

Pondering this question reminded me of a conversation among vocation directors who were discussing racism in religious communities. One said, "Well, I can't just ask a candidate if he's a racist, can I?"

The group chuckled, and then one said, "Perhaps that is exactly what we should do."

Her explanation was that the racism that mars our society has inevitably marked all of us in some way. If we admit this, we can be alert to it and strive to overcome it. If we assume that we are unmarked by the racism some call the original sin of the United States, it is likely to control us without our being aware of it.

The idea of racism as a structural sin that permeates society leads to the consideration of similar evils that permeate our social life and institutions. Those would include materialism, (hetero) sexism, consumerism, individualism and other similar attitudes that blunt our consciousness by their prevalence, thereby leaving us blind to aberrations that have become societally acceptable.



(Mark Bartholomew)

The Gospel for this Sunday calls us to question the opinions we hold and to be cautious about where we look for guidance. The quest for a good guide is far from easy.

Bertrand Russell is quoted as saying, "Fools and fanatics are always so certain of themselves, and wiser people so full of doubts." That is a fine summary of his agnosticism but also a reminder that believers need a good dose of humility whenever they purport to speak of the things of God. Jesus didn't promise to give anyone perfect knowledge or judgment, only the power to forgive without limits — a faculty that presumes that we all make a good share of mistakes.

Today's Gospel suggests that we trust our individual and collective judgments as completely as we would trust a blind guide. The one thing that might lead us to trust such a guide would be her admission that she is blind. That would induce us to assume a solid share of the responsibility for determining the route we are to take.

As that happens, we will find ourselves transformed from being guides and followers into fellow discerners. We will rely on more than our own point of view. We will learn to be cautious about the road to take, aware that we cannot know all about it. We will also lean on one another, ready to catch or be caught when something trips one of us up.

Maybe Jesus was actually encouraging us to be blind guides, ready to admit our incapacity so that we could help one another and become open to broader, deeper visions.

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[Mary M. McGlone is a Sister of St. Joseph currently writing the history of the Sisters of St. Joseph in the U.S.]

**Editor's note:** *This Sunday Scripture commentary was originally published in the January 2019 issue of [Celebration](#), a comprehensive pastoral resource. To read the full version of the commentary, click [here](#). Sign up to receive [weekly Scripture for Life emails](#).*

A version of this story appeared in the **Feb 22-March 7, 2019** print issue under the headline: The gift of blind guides.