Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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“For every tree is known by its own fruit” (Luke 6:44).

Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Sir 27:4-7; Ps 92; 1 Cor 15:54-58; Lk 6:39-45

Jesus must have been familiar with the rich store of biblical aphorisms and metaphors found in the Wisdom books, Sirach and Proverbs. He was himself a master of images and parables that made his teachings vivid and memorable. Sirach explores today how speech reveals the soul of the speaker, sound or shallow, wise or foolish, and how actions expose character in the same way fruit reveals the health of a tree.

In today’s Gospel, Luke offers a series of Jesus’ images about similar themes: The blind cannot lead the blind; Students reflect their teachers; If we don’t know our own flaws, we can’t help others deal with theirs; We know a tree by its fruit. These sayings reveal how perceptive Jesus was in dealing with both his critics and his own disciples. He could read people’s hearts even if they tried to hide their real intentions, as was the case with some of the scribes and Pharisees. He called them out as hypocrites. As he chose each of the Apostles, Jesus saw deep into them to find their true character and potential for growth.

It must have been unnerving to be in Jesus’ company, knowing how deeply he was listening to everyone speak or how he observed the motives behind actions. His purity of heart made everyone transparent to him. His look of love must have overwhelmed those he chose to be with him, to know that he could see everything and still loved them. Or how withering it must have been for his self-important enemies to know that Jesus knew they were putting on a false face while harboring contempt for him.

Before they learn the filters and protocols adults use socially, children are often this perceptive. They feel the negative energy around certain people and avoid phonies and those who feign affection. They tell the truth even when it offends, to the embarrassment of their parents. On the positive side, how many friendships have been born of a simple honest look across a crowded room at a truth-telling wink or when two strangers drop their guard and fall in love with the real person behind the human face just revealed to them.

If the secret of a full life is to see and hear reality around us, how tragic it is that so many people limit their encounter with the world, blinded by prejudice, racism, judgmentalism and just small-mindedness. They go through life never seeing the beauty of human diversity, deaf to the music of the Earth, closed to the cry of human suffering and the chance to open their hearts to others in need.

The Little Prince learns from the Fox that “only with the heart do we see rightly.” The Pharisees who opposed him refused to see the image of God in the face of Jesus or in themselves. Dead within, they produced no fruit. A noisy, pulsating consumer society drowns out the inner voices that can reveal everything to those who stop by putting aside their screens and earbuds to listen within and contemplate the simple beauty of people and ordinary life everywhere.

We begin Lent this week, a time to find the desert places where silence can heal the soul and teach us what is important and what is not. By depriving our appetites for a time, we can awaken our innate desire for truth and deepen our compassion for the millions who hunger and thirst for justice, dignity, security and satisfaction. We hit the road again with Jesus, bound for Calvary and then Glory. This is the joy of the Gospel.

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