Spirituality
Scripture for Life
Voices of Sisters
Spirituality



Virtual glasses using artificial intelligence are seen in this photo. (CNS/Reuters/Yves Herman)



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What would Jesus say about artificial intelligence? Because he lived long before the age of the combustion engine and Apollo 11, we might think that such an idea never crossed his mind. Nevertheless, he talked about it in today's Gospel — though not the robotic type. Jesus seemed to agree with Sirach, who described the difference between husks and grain, or we might say, bluster and truth.

AI offers uncountable tidbits of knowledge — so many distracting facts that wisdom tosses up her hands as she waits to hear anything with genuine meaning. We live in the world Pope Francis describes as caught up in "the feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures." For instance, Google tells me that the average supermarket offers over 250 varieties of cereal. The people who frequent these stores probably have no idea about how to thresh and winnow grain, they're just happy it comes in easy-open boxes. How are 21st-century urban dwellers to understand today's selection from the Book of Sirach if they've never even watched the natural process?

Sirach used the process of extracting inedible husks from good grain to exemplify what happens when puffed-up people speak. They expose their superficiality, offering words devoid of nutritive value. They put good shells on exhibit, failing to realize that what is valuable resides hidden deep inside.

Paul explains something similar, saying that the fragile and passing dimensions of life are only shells of the incorruptible life that flows from relationships with God and neighbor. Concentration on the insubstantial (fame, wealth, power), all that is inherently temporary and ultimately hollow, creates effective protection against the kind of profound encounter that draws out our humanity in ever-richer ways.

Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

March 2, 2025

Sirach 27:4-7
Psalm 92
1 Corinthians 15:54-58
Luke 6:39-45

In today's Gospel, Jesus asks, "Can a blind person guide a blind person?" Today he might ask, "Can artificial intelligence produce anything except artificiality?" In truth, a blind person may be the best one to teach another to navigate the world in ways that do not rely on sight. Those who use AI can become well prepared enough to sift through chaff to get to wheat. But much of our communication, entertainment and politics militate against such discernment; instead they overwhelm us with so much trivial information that we end up like a hunter-gatherer seeking millet or manioca in the Aldi's cereal aisle.

The story of the speck and the beam gives us another example of Jesus' understanding of AI. In ancient Israel, wood was so expensive that people constructed their homes with stones and adobe-like bricks. Most of the wooden beams they could see were in the Temple and they were typically between 15 and 42 feet long, weighing an average of about 300 pounds. That's a lot to hold in front of you while trying to extract some dust from someone's eye!

Jesus had a sense of humor and loved to make people laugh — and slowly realize they were laughing at themselves.

Jesus made ludicrous comparisons to help people comprehend the ridiculousness of the situations around them. He wanted them to judge well the difference between chaff and wheat, between trees solidly planted near living streams and the capricious leaves that make a spectacular show on their way to becoming mulch.

It becomes pretty obvious that today's Liturgy of the Word prods us to seek wisdom that sidesteps a myriad of distractions. Media, advertising and attention-seeking public figures are playing "Made you look!" with us, often, to draw our attention away from how they are threatening truth, human thriving and pulling off other actions and attitudes that counter the reign of God.

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There's a poster that features Albert Einstein and the quote, "Two things are infinite, the universe and human stupidity; and I'm not sure about the universe." Today's Gospel ends with Jesus' suggestions about where to seek good fruit. Jesus sums it all up, saying, "from the fullness of the heart, the mouth speaks."

Today's question seems to be, what will lead us to wisdom of heart? First, we need enough humility and self-knowledge to recognize that we are all blind in some ways and that we need one another's discerning guidance. Second, we need to cultivate our awareness that the fault we dislike and criticize in another is very often a reflection of our own failings. Most of all, we need to look to the Master again and again, remembering that accurate understanding of Christ's teaching will make us uncomfortable and goad us to grow.

As long as we maintain awareness of the homegrown logs that block our sight, we can offer Gospel-based criticism of what is happening around us. Not only that, but we will be compelled to expose the lies and distractions that come from rotten trees and stores of evil.

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