

8<sup>th</sup> Sunday per Annum - C  
Sirach 24:4-7;  
I Corinthians 15:54-58;  
Luke 6:39-45  
Little Flower - 3/2/25

My Brothers and Sisters,

In today's Gospel, Jesus continues to share practical wisdom with us through the use of three images. We have to understand that some of Jesus' teachings were not specifically religious or Christian but simply human wisdom. This practical wisdom is especially relevant as we prepare for Ash Wednesday this week.

Jesus asked, “*Can a blind person guide a blind person? Will not both fall into the pit?*” Our temptation today is to surround ourselves with people who see, think, and act like us. For example, if I remember correctly, after the 2016 election, one couple divorced because they were on opposite sides of the political divide. Likewise, since 2016, many friendships have been weakened or destroyed because of political divisions.

The fragmentation of the media and social media have contributed to the narrowing of our perspectives. Most people get their TV news from a news outlet which confirms what they already believe. If you listen to talk radio, you probably listen to commentators who align with what you already believe. Social media encourages extreme positions. We follow Internet sites with which we agree. What is true of the divisions in society is equally true of divisions within the Church.

On the other hand, Jesus continually challenged his listeners to think, see, and act in new ways. Therefore, I have to believe that Jesus wants us to be open to being challenged. Right before I graduated from college and before I went to Rome, Fr. Blaise Hettich challenged me to choose friends who were brighter and better than I. He said that many people choose friends who are less bright and less good in order to feel good about themselves. I believe that was one of the best pieces of advice I ever received. In such a relationship, we grow and become equal because each of us has gifts to share.

Jesus also asked, “*Why do you notice the splinter in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own?*” Most of us overfocus on the faults of others. Because we do not want to confront our own faults, we focus on and magnify the faults of others. Paradoxically, sometimes the faults of others on which we focus are actually faults we have in common with them. Also, sometimes we overfocus on and magnify the faults of others because we can only feel good about ourselves by comparing others unfavorably to us. If we want to overcome the temptation to compare others unfavorably to us, we probably need to practice self-affirmation. In other words, we need to recognize the good we do as much as the bad.

Jesus said, “*A good tree does not bear rotten fruit, nor does a rotten tree bear good fruit.*” People have often asked how they can know their standing before God. Jesus tells us to look at our behavior. As I have often reminded people, the best test of love or friendship is whether we bring out the best in each other consistently. Today's first reading reminds us that what people say reveals a lot about them. Although we often say that actions speak louder than words, today's first reading reminds us that our words are important because we reveal ourselves through our words as much as we reveal ourselves through our actions.

My brothers and sisters, to be good Christians, we first have to be good persons. To measure our human and Christian growth, we need to be honest with ourselves, look at our behavior, and allow ourselves to be challenged.