

Weekend Readings & Reflections

February 26-27, 2022 – Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reflection: In today's readings we hear Jesus speaking in Galilee as well as a Jewish sage named Sirach writing in Jerusalem more than a century earlier. The two of them touch upon a single truth: The words that come out of us make known the hidden thoughts within us. Speech reveals the secrets of the heart. Sirach teaches that speaking is "the test of men" and their character. One who is upright will utter words that are truthful and encouraging to others. But one whose heart is cluttered with "refuse" will be exposed, since the "fruit" of his mouth speaks volumes about the "tree" that produces it. Sirach also compares the testing of our words to clay fired in a kiln—if properly prepared, a useful vessel emerges; but if the clay is not fully dried, it will break apart in the extreme heat. In a similar way, Jesus insists that a person speaks "out of the abundance of the heart." He too compares our speech, whether good or bad, to what grows on a tree: "For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit." Both readings urge us to make wholesome speech a habit. After all, much about who we are is brought to light through what we say. But there's an additional step: The Lord is asking us to look inward, to examine our hearts and fill them with the "good treasure" that God desires. Why do purity of heart and speech matter so much? Because, as Jesus declares elsewhere: "by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned" ([Matthew 12:37](#)). They matter because they help to decide our final judgment, and this is where the Second Reading comes in. Paul reminds us that God will destroy death forever, and if we are to share in this victory and live forever with the Lord, then we must take all steps necessary to give our hearts and lips to what is good.

OPENING PRAYER

Leader: Welcome our discussion on the Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time, let us begin in prayer by praying a prayer from the Missionaries of Charity Prayer Book:

All: Dear Jesus, help me to spread thy fragrance everywhere I go. Flood my soul with thy spirit and love. Penetrate and possess my whole being so utterly that all my life may only be a radiance of thine. Shine through me and be so in me that every soul I come in contact with may feel thy presence in my soul. Let them look up and see no longer me but only Jesus. Stay with me and then I shall begin to shine as you shine, so to shine as to be a light to others. Amen.

Leader: Discipleship is uniquely oriented toward bearing fruit. Sometimes these fruits come through hardships and struggles we encounter in our lives. Take some time to reflect on the various "fruits" of a follower of Christ. What are some of the "fruits" you might think should be found in the Christian disciple? How is God calling you to be his disciple and to bear fruit for the kingdom? Do you see any ways in which you've grown through difficult times? Reflect on these questions as we listen to Jim Beckman in today's video.

(Play the video on [FORMED.org](#) - [Opening the Word – Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time \(Year C\)](#))

Digging Deeper Bearing the Fruits of the Holy Spirit

"Now the works of the flesh are obvious: immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, rivalry, jealousy, outbursts of fury, acts of selfishness, dissensions, factions, occasions of envy, drinking bouts, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. In contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ (Jesus) have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also follow the Spirit." —Galatians 5:19-25

FIRST READING ~ Sirach 27:4-7 ~

When a sieve is shaken, the husks appear; so do one's faults when one speaks. As the test of what the potter molds is in the furnace, so in tribulation is the test of the just. The fruit of a tree shows the care it has had; so too does one's speech disclose the bent of one's mind. Praise no one before he speaks, for it is then that people are tested.

The Book of Sirach is also known as "Ecclesiasticus, or the Wisdom of Jesus, Son of Sirach." It teaches ethical and theological topics and ideas. It talks a lot about the tongue and speech and the author indicates here that a person's thoughts and words are a mirror of what lies in the soul. People can be smooth talkers until they are shaken or put through tribulation and the husks they try to hide are revealed.

- *How true do you think it is that a person's talk reveals who they really are? How attentive are you to your own speech?*

SECOND READING ~ 1 Corinthians 15:54-58 ~

Brothers and sisters: When this which is corruptible clothes itself with incorruptibility and this which is mortal clothes itself with immortality, then the word that is written shall come about:

Death is swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brothers and sisters, be firm, steadfast, always fully devoted to the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

The revolutionary hope of Christianity is in these words of Paul. Corinth was a major cosmopolitan sea-trading city. Idolatry and immorality were rife. Paul insists we can overcome sin through Christ. (15:57).

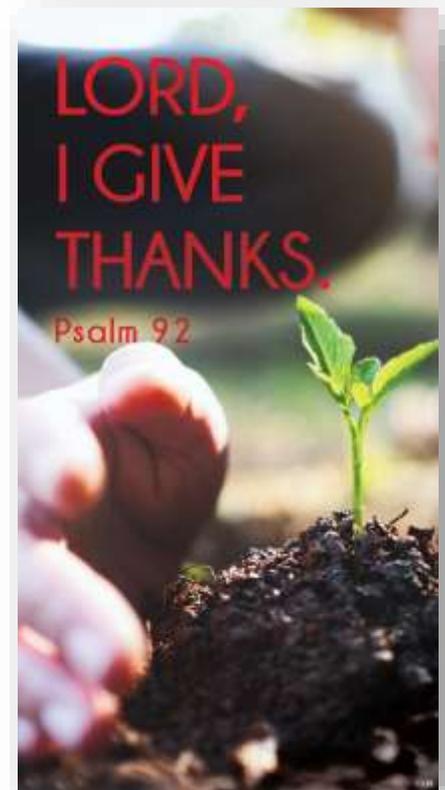
- *What do you think Paul means when he says God gives us the 'victory' through Jesus? How have you experienced this 'victory' or a degree of mastery over sin? What area of your life do you most need 'victory'? How do you reconcile suffering with the promises of Christ? What encourages you most about Paul's words?*

Paul acknowledges our 'corruptible' bodies but states we will be clothed in Christ's 'incorruptibility' and 'immortality'.

- *How does that make you feel?*

Paul also says that the Resurrection means nothing we do is wasted. We often don't see the results of our efforts but if we truly believe Christ has won the victory then as the saying goes; we may lose the battle but win the war. In God's case the war is already won. Paul's perspective calls us not to idly 'hope' for some future heaven, but to live right now in God's reign. We are called to do all the good we can today, knowing everything we do matters to God.

- *How do I let that truth impact my daily life?*



GOSPEL ~ Luke 6:39-45~

Jesus told his disciples a parable, “Can a blind person guide a blind person? Will not both fall into a pit? No disciple is superior to the teacher; but when fully trained, every disciple will be like his teacher. Why do you notice the splinter in your brother’s eye, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own? How can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me remove that splinter in your eye,’ when you do not even notice the wooden beam in your own eye? You hypocrite! Remove the wooden beam from your eye first; then you will see clearly to remove the splinter in your brother’s eye. “A good tree does not bear rotten fruit, nor does a rotten tree bear good fruit. For every tree is known by its own fruit. For people do not pick figs from thornbushes, nor do they gather grapes from brambles. A good person out of the store of goodness in his heart produces good, but an evil person out of a store of evil produces evil; for from the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks.”

- *Do you see any connections between the Gospel and the first reading?*

Jesus challenges us to not talk the talk but to walk the talk. St Augustine asked, “Suppose that God wishes to fill you with honey [a symbol of God’s tenderness and goodness]; but if you are full of vinegar, where will you put the honey?”

- *When did you last seriously review your own talk, habits & reactions for ‘vinegar’? How hard is it for you to trust others? How is testing others different from criticizing? What help do you need from God to fill your heart with honey and ‘a store of goodness’?*

“...Every tree is known by its own fruit’. God has equipped us to bear good fruit.

- *How are you tending the fruit tree of your life? How do others experience you as a person and a Christian? Is there a difference? If so, how or why?*

MEDITATION

The Gospel of Luke was written by a disciple who was trained as a physician. Luke, with keen insight, portrays Jesus as the good physician and shepherd of souls who seeks out those who desire healing, pardon, and restoration of body, mind, and spirit. Jesus came to free us from the worst oppression possible - slavery to sin, fear, and condemnation. Like a gentle and skillful doctor, the Lord Jesus exposes the cancer of sin, evil, and oppression in our lives so we can be set free and restored to wholeness. A key step to healing and restoration requires that we first submit to the physician who can heal us. The Lord Jesus is our great Physician because he heals the whole person - soul and body, mind and heart - and restores us to abundant life both now and for the age to come in his everlasting kingdom.

The Lord Jesus wants to heal and restore us to wholeness, not only for our own sake alone. He also wants us to be his instruments of healing, pardon, and restoration for others as well. What can hinder us from helping others draw near to Jesus the divine Physician? The Rabbis taught: "He who judges his neighbor favorably will be judged favorably by God." How easy it is to misjudge others and how difficult it is to be impartial in giving good judgment. Our judgment of others is usually "off the mark" because we can't see inside the other person, or we don't have access to all the facts, or we are swayed by instinct and unreasoning reactions to people. It is easier to find fault

in others than in oneself. A critical and judgmental spirit crushes rather than heals, oppresses rather than restores, repels rather than attracts. "Thinking the best of other people" is necessary if we wish to grow in love. And kindness in judgment is nothing less than a sacred duty.

Jesus states a heavenly principle we can stake our lives on: *what you give to others (and how you treat others) will return to you* (Mark 4:24). The Lord knows our faults and he sees all, even the imperfections and sins of the heart which we cannot recognize in ourselves. Like a gentle father and a skillful doctor, he patiently draws us to his *seat of mercy* and removes the cancer of sin which inhabits our hearts. Do you trust in God's mercy and grace? Ask the Lord to flood your heart with his loving-kindness and mercy that you may only have room for charity, forbearance, and kindness towards your neighbor.

Why does Jesus set figs and grapes over against thorns and brambles (Luke 6:33-35)? The fig tree was the favorite of all trees for the people of Palestine. It symbolized fertility, peace, and prosperity. Grapes, likewise, produced wine, the symbol of joy. Thorns and brambles were only good for burning as fuel for the fire. There's a proverbial saying that you know a tree by its fruit. Likewise, a person will produce good or bad fruit depending on what is sown in the heart. Charles Read said: "Sow an act and you reap a habit. Sow a habit and you reap a character. Sow a character and you reap a destiny." Character, like fruit, doesn't grow overnight. It takes a lifetime.

How do we avoid falsehood and bad fruit in our lives? By being true - true to God, his Word, and the grace and help He gives us so we can turn away from evil and wrongdoing. And that takes character! Those who are true to God know that their strength lies not in themselves but in God who supplies everything we need to live as his disciples. The Lord strengthens us with the fruits and gifts of the Holy Spirit - with faith, hope and love, justice, prudence, fortitude and temperance. And we grow in godly character through exercising the gifts and strength which God supplies. Do you want to bear good fruit in your daily life? Allow the Holy Spirit to train you in godliness and the wisdom to distinguish good fruit from bad fruit (1 Timothy 4:7-8, Hebrews 5:14).

- *Do you trust in God's mercy and grace? What does this mean to you and the way you are living?*
- *What can hinder us from helping others draw near to Jesus the divine Physician?*
- *How am I using the good fruits God has given me? How do I avoid falsehood and bad fruits in my life?*

CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: In closing, let us pray together:

ALL: O Father, give us the humility which realizes its ignorance, admits its mistakes, recognizes its need, welcomes advice, accepts rebuke. Help us always to praise rather than to criticize, to sympathize rather than to discourage, to build rather than to destroy, and to think of people at their best rather than at their worst. Amen.

Leader: (if time, let us offer up our intercessions ... St. Michael... Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...)

[Opening reflection was shared from St. Paul Center at <https://stpaulcenter.com/studies-tools/sunday-bible-reflections>]

[video can be found at FORMED.ORG "Opening the Word". Additional reflections can be found at FORMED in "Opening the Word"]

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