

16 Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C March 3, 2019
Sirach 27:4-7 Psalm 92 1 Corinthians 15:54-58 Luke 6:39-45

In last week's Gospel message, Jesus said that we are to love and to forgive. This week's Gospel continues with the same message, except Jesus narrows it down not to judge or find fault in others. What does Jesus have in mind when He commands us to stop judging?

Judging, in this sense, means focusing on the flaws of others and ignoring their virtues, attributing bad motives to others, faultfinding. Jesus warns that those who judge in order to condemn will themselves be judged and condemned. How do we judge or find fault in others?

This brings us to the heart of today's Gospel when Jesus says, "Why do you see the speck in your neighbour's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?" Jesus further says, "*You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbour's eye.*"

Sometimes it can be easy to find fault with others. We are invited to search carefully for our own faults as we do for the faults of others, because looking at our faults will leave precious little time for seeing the failures of others. The person who is aware of his or her weaknesses and is striving to overcome them is slow to judge others.

The appealing thing about faultfinding in others is that it takes the focus off our own deficiencies and helps us to feel ever so self-righteous. It is no exaggeration to say that gossip and judging are the most vicious and dangerous types of talk. Passing on scandalous tales does untold damage as it results in tearing a person's reputation to shreds or it could even lead a person to commit suicide.

I have experienced first-hand many times how gossip and judging others has led to a person committing suicide. The last funeral I celebrated at the mission was for a father of two children. Gossip had spread throughout the village that the government was going to take away his two young children. His wife was broken-hearted. The gossip was lies.

The father was so devastated that he went into the woodshed beside his home and hung himself. The child who found his father hanging will suffer for the rest of his

life. To celebrate the funeral Mass for the man was very difficult for me because many people who attended were the ones who had gossiped about the man. If we cannot say something good about another person then it is better to remain silent and not say anything.

What we say is more powerful and long lasting than anything we do with our fist. We can physically assault a person and the bodily wounds will probably heal. But if we verbally abuse someone, our words can cut into places deeper than the body. They cut into the heart and soul of a person and those wounds from another's words do not heal that easily. We have all probably experienced that.

The old saying to the effect that "sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never hurt me" *is a lie*. We all know the terrible hurt caused from gossip or being judged.

If we steal money from another person, we can give it back with interest. But what if we steal that person's reputation, his or her good name? Can we ever give that back? Can we call back the words we said as they continue to travel to places of which we never dreamed? They are out of our control.

This brings me to another personal experience when I found it very difficult to help a woman because of the gossip that was being spread about her at work which was untrue. As a result of the gossip, she lost her job and had to move. The gossip was all vicious lies. Jesus says "Stop judging, that you may not be judged. For as you judge, so you will be judged." (Matthew 7:1-2).

The lesson Jesus is teaching us is how dangerous it is to pass judgment on others. It stands at the heart of the Gospel message. Jesus was never in the judgment business. He used words to heal, restore and to bring back life, joy and hope. Our striving to imitate Our Lord and produce the fruits of good living is seriously hampered when we allow judgmental attitudes, gossiping, tittle-tattle, and passing on lies to take root in our lives. Jesus says, "*No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit; for each tree is known by its own fruit.*"

We want to be like good trees that bear good fruit. We want all our words to be pure and honest and truthful to image the Son of God. Today, when we receive the sacred Body and Blood of Christ, let us promise Him that we will dedicate our tongues

to good words about other people, because they honour Him, the Word of the Father. Our words will carry the words of Our Lord. If our heart reflects Christ, so will our words reflect Him.

I would like to close with a story. A certain man lay dying from a broken heart. Gossip, judging and wagging tongues had ruined his life, his marriage and his work. A woman, who had been one of the principal offenders, came to ask for his forgiveness. She said, "I am sorry for my sins of slander against you. Is there anything I can do to restore your good name?"

The dying man pulled out a pillow from under his feeble head and handed it to her and said: "Go up to the church tower, cut open this pillow case and empty out all the feathers that are inside."

The lady did as she was told. A strong wind blew the feathers in every direction. Then she returned to the man. "Now," he said to her, "go out and gather up all those feathers and put them back into the pillow case." "But that's impossible," objected the lady, "the wind has blown the feathers across the whole town."

The dying man said to her: "And that is just how impossible it is for you to get back my good name for me now."

We are reminded what Jesus said at the beginning of today's Gospel, "*Why do you see the speck in your neighbour's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?*"