

March 3, 2019

11:00 a.m.

Pretty Lake Camp

Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time/Young Adult Retreat

One of my mother's (may she rest in peace) most frequent admonitions to me and my brother/sisters while we were growing up when we might have engaged in harsh talking or name-calling with one another was: "If you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all." Needless to say we had a lot of quiet meals and play times. But that was such wise advice.

For all intents and purposes, the "art" of civil discourse has been lost, or at least is woefully lacking. There are so many different "platforms" for discourse today, much of it with the ability to maintain anonymity, which leads many people to resort to mean, negative, hurtful, and sometimes destructive communications. It's almost as though people have lost any ability to be courteous, and any willingness to give another person the "benefit of the doubt". If the whole world would somehow mysteriously heed my mother's wise admonition, we would, sadly, have a very quiet world.

We see this in the most public of forums – the highest levels of political office – where people refuse to "see the other person's point", where compromise is a bad word, and where Truth has lost any sense of objective reality, but is now purely subjective, even to the point where people actually use the phrase: "my truth" and "your truth", when we all know that there is only one Truth – That which is true. Everything else is opinion.

The relatively new phenomenon of 24-hour cable news and internet blogs seems to have produced a whole lot of "opinions" rather than news. There doesn't seem to be any concern about "objective" news reporting, but rather "news" is reported depending on where one stands on the political spectrum; where getting something correct is not nearly as important as getting it out first, and in the most enticing headlines that may or may not be accurate. We are quick to judge, quicker to condemn, and most quick of all to do whatever it takes to "win" any argument even if it means destroying someone's reputation and good name in the process.

So, Jesus' strong teaching to His disciples that we just heard are pointed, basic (that is, foundational), and blunt, mixed in with a bit of "Rabbinic humor". The

way Jesus taught these foundational principles of what it means to even be considered to be one of His followers was truly “masterful”. And so Jesus asks, perhaps with a knowing smile: “*Can a blind person guide a blind person? Will not both fall into a pit?*” He continues: “*How can you notice a splinter in your brother’s eye, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own?*” People were probably falling down laughing, imagining his exaggerated and humorous examples; but the point was not at all funny!

They would get that message when Jesus ended up saying: “*You hypocrite!*” That’s when Jesus explains what the point is: it is not for any of us to judge another; for any of us to condemn another; for any of us to even criticize another. That’s up to God. We need to be in charge of ourselves – to correct what needs to be corrected in our own thoughts, our own words, and our own deeds, and to make the resolutions to **live a holy life** by following Jesus – by thinking as Jesus thinks, always being mindful of the Father’s Love for us and our commitment to follow God’s ways; by speaking with the charity, kindness, and compassion that Jesus speaks; by doing the loving, kind, generous and sacrificial deeds that Jesus did and continues to do.

In other words, we are to practice the Theological Virtues, Cardinal Virtues, and every other virtue to the best of our abilities as “Grown up” Followers of Jesus.

It’s important to remember that over the last 3 Sundays, the Gospel passages have given us Jesus’ entire “Sermon on the Plain” as recorded by St. Luke. The counterpart to this in St. Matthew’s Gospel we know as the “Sermon on the Mount”, where it takes Matthew 3 whole chapters to record everything. St. Luke records the entire Sermon in one Chapter, Chapter 6, which we’ve heard over these 3 Sundays. But, no matter what “title” it holds, this Sermon contains all of Jesus’ basic teachings in regard to what it takes to be one of His followers.

Remember two Sundays ago, we heard the beginning of Jesus’ Sermon on the Plain with Luke’s version of the Beatitudes: 4 “*Blesseds*” for those who don’t have much in terms of material goods or accomplishments in this world, for their reward will be great in Heaven; and 4 “*Woes*” for those who have everything in this world, often by denying those “things” to others, but will be filled with Woe in the life to come which they will not enter into.

Last Sunday, the passage from that important Sermon was a number of particular, and very counter-cultural “rules” that Jesus said we, who are His followers must “hear” and “heed”, including “*loving your enemies*”, “*doing good to those who hate you*”, “*blessing those who curse you*”, and “*praying for those who mistreat you*”, all summed up in what we know as the Golden Rule: “*Do to others as you would have them do to you!*”.

And this Sunday, we are told NOT to judge, criticize or condemn, and, we are told TO focus on our own selves, because, as Jesus reminds us: “*Every tree is known by its own fruit!*” What kind of “fruit” are we producing in our lives?

Lent starts in just a few days. As we all know, Lent challenges us to reflect on what it is about our lives, as baptized followers of Jesus, that we need to change, be converted from, that we need to fertilize and grow in? And so on Ash Wednesday, we will be reminded – in the most graphic way possible by marking our foreheads with ashes – about who we are: 1) mortal human beings, and 2) sinners. And since that’s true, what do we need to do to grow in holiness, that is, which Virtues do we need to focus our attention on to help us turn from sin and grow in holiness?

Each of today’s Readings give us great ideas, or themes, to help us choose Lenten Resolutions with a practical purpose in our lives, more than just the typical resolutions of “giving up candy”, “not eating between meals”, or “reducing our screen time a bit”. We should ask ourselves: what do we need to change? Where do we need to grow?

For example in today’s First Reading, Sirach’s focus on the “faults” which get revealed when we shake out all the other stuff with the “sieve” that he spoke of in that Reading; being aware of our faults, and being sorry for those faults. So, a really good Lenten Resolution might be: making a good Examination of Conscience every day, and then making sure that we get to Confession on a regular basis to confess our faults/sins so we can keep growing in holiness.

Today’s Gospel Reading provides numerous ideas for Lenten resolutions, that mostly might deal with focusing on developing “good fruit” from the trees of our own lives, rather than on trying to criticize or change the faults we might see in those other people in our lives.

And today’s Second Reading, from St. Paul’s Letter to the Corinthians, really gets at the “heart” of what Lent is all about. Perhaps our Lenten Resolution could

be to “make this the best Lent we’ve had so far”. Seeing this Season as more than a time to repent; but also a time to be renewed – to be refreshed – to be re-ignited – to be re-minded of how special we are to God that He would send His Son Jesus to do what He did for you/me! We could even use St. Paul’s own words to format that Lenten Resolution: *“Be firm, steadfast, always fully devoted to the work of the Lord.”*

This time of Retreat is coming to an end, but I pray that what you’ve reflected on, the insights that you’ve been inspired by the Holy Spirit to gain, and the resolutions that you are committed to make to help you to grow in holiness will begin with God’s blessings, and continue each day as you pray for God’s graces to guide you to live in union with Him, because as St. Paul reminded us: *“In the Lord, your labor is never in vain.”* God bless you, now and always!