

8th Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)
(Sirach 27:4-7 / Luke 6:39-45)
27.02.2022

Dear brothers and sisters,

We have just heard at the end of today's gospel: "A good man draws what is good from the store of goodness in his heart; a bad man draws what is bad from the store of badness (in his heart). For a man's words flow out of what fills his heart". In other words: Whatever we do, say or think has its source in our heart. The quality of what we do, say or think depends upon what is happening within our heart. So, our hearts – what is happening or not happening within them – are the key I propose to use to open the Scriptures heard this morning.

In the Bible, the word 'heart' does not refer to the cardiac muscle, or to 'the feelings' with which we respond to another person, or to the superficial emotion we call 'sentimentality'. In the Bible, the word 'heart' refers to the inner core of our being, the place where we make our choices and take our decisions in the presence of God, because we believe that the Holy Trinity dwells within our hearts.

If our hearts are filled with fear, anger, jealousy, hatred or violence, then it is obvious that what will come from our hearts will be motivated by fear, anger, jealousy, hatred or violence. Consequently, our words will bring darkness instead of light; desolation instead of consolation; death instead of life.

But if our hearts are filled with a constant awareness of the Lord's presence, if our hearts are accustomed to prayer and nourished by our daily reading of the Sacred Scriptures, then what will come from our hearts will be words and actions that have a gospel savour to them.

From this perspective, we can listen to the first reading once again: "the defects of a man appear in his talk.., the test of a man is in his conversation.., a man's words betray what he feels... do not praise a man before he has spoken, since this is the test of men". The message is clear: our words come from our heart; our words reveal something of our heart: who we are and how we are situated in life. There is matter for reflection for all of us in each one of these statements.

Let us now consider the four short parables that constitute the gospel passage heard this morning.

The first saying reads: "Can one blind man guide another? Surely both will fall into a pit?"

If our hearts are filled with the presence of the Lord who is the light of the world, then we shall be able to guide others and communicate the light of Christ to them, we shall be able to show them the path of life. There will be no risk of us both falling into a pit.

But if our hearts are filled with ourselves – our puffed up false self – then darkness and death of every kind will not be far from us and it will affect those we may think we are helping.

The second saying reads: "The disciple is not superior to his teacher; the fully trained disciple will always be like his teacher."

In this short saying, Jesus is not speaking of the relationship between a teacher and his pupil. Good teachers know that they should desire and rejoice to see their pupils becoming greater than they themselves are. Sometimes it can be difficult for teachers to accept this, but this is the way it

should be: the right way. It is a great grace when the pupil excels and even exceeds his or her teacher.

In this saying, Jesus is speaking of the relationship between Himself and his disciples. If Christ is our teacher, then we cannot be superior to Him. We are called to follow Him, to bear witness to him or even to become other Christs. What is important for good disciples is to welcome Christ's presence within their hearts through prayer and the reading of the Scriptures so that they may become more and more Christ-like. Good disciples bear witness to the divine presence they carry within. From this perspective it is true that the disciple is not superior to his teacher. In the best case scenario, the disciple becomes an icon of Christ, a sign of his presence, and even the disciple gives his life for his Master.

The third saying is the well-known parable of the splinter and the plank. There is a tendency among all of us not only to be lacking in mercy with our brothers and sisters, even for the least of their mistakes, but also to be so self-indulgent as to be in complete denial in regard to ourselves, even when it comes to faults that are grave. We see the speck of dust in the eye of our brother or sister and ignore the plank in our own eye.

We should never forget that we are fundamentally sinners. I don't say that in a moralistic or judgmental sense, but because it is a non-negotiable truth of our faith: we are all of us sinners who have fallen short of God's grace. The presence of Christ in our hearts should remind us that we are creatures and not our creator. We are creatures who not only are loved by their creator but who also and above all need to be saved and forgiven by Him. We look for the Lord's healing and pardon. This is the light that the presence of Christ deploys within us. When we are properly situated we say: who am I to judge or criticize another? Who am I to point out to others their limitations, even their obvious limitations? It has already been said many times from this pulpit and elsewhere, when we point our index finger toward someone, three fingers are pointed back towards our self.

Sometimes it is our duty to make a remark to someone, but we must do so with humility and with the desire to help the other grow; we must correct others in a Christ-like manner, with gentleness and respect.

Does it not happen that, when we make a remark to a brother or a sister, we do this to divert attention away from ourselves. One way of excusing our limitations is by pointing out any tiny negligence we can see in the life of others. In any case, the point to be grasped is this: everything depends upon what is in our heart, or more precisely who is in our heart. Is our heart pure? Is it filled with Christ's presence? Or is our heart full of ourselves, filled with our weaknesses and our sins?

The last parable brings us back to the beginning of our meditation, that is to say to our heart. "A sound tree produces a sound fruit. A rotten tree produces a rotten fruit". Everything depends upon the quality of our heart... it depends upon what we allow to enter in our heart. The monastic tradition encourages us to strive for a pure heart, a heart which is unified because of our awareness of the Lord's presence within us. The presence of God in our hearts influences our choices, our decision making, our way of living, all that we say. The presence of the Lord in our hearts, our attention to his presence within us allows our lives to bear fruit, a fruit which has a rich gospel savour to it.

Let us ask the Lord for the grace of a pure heart, a heart aware of and docile to the Lord's presence within us. Then our lives will bear fruit, fruit which will last.