

March 3, 2019

Sir 27:4-7; 1 Cor 15:54-58; Lk 6:39-45

Jesus asks a really good question to us today: *Can a blind person guide a blind person?* Can someone who does not see what they are doing make the best guide? This leads us to another question - how do we know if we or another person are a bit blind? How can we know if our sight is clear to guide another, or if someone we are relying on to guide us can see where they are going? Since all people can have some level of blindness - even us - how can we ever know if we can trust another ... or ourselves?

I once knew a guy - let's call him Jake - who could tell you everything other people were doing wrong. He was good at this for two reasons. First, he was pretty accurate with pointing out these flaws it seemed - he just looked to be right; and second, he was so assured - he had an answer for every response - how could you doubt him. But a few things began to show. To begin with, he had his own flaws - as we all do - yet when these were pointed out he had a hard time admitting them. To the people around him, his flaws were as obvious as the ones he was pointing out to others - but he didn't see them. In the clearest example of this, a group of us was talking about going to the casino. We all knew he went there pretty regularly and seemed excited about it. This was brought up and he said "well I do go, but I never overdo it, I'm always in complete control." As the conversation went on he said things like "I only maxed out my credit cards there a couple of times," and when we were talking about the lack of windows in the casino he said "yeah, one time I was up playing all night and didn't notice." As a couple of us walked away, one guy turned to me and said: "the more he talked, the more it looks like he has a problem." It is amazing how we can have such a problem, that is obvious to others, yet we are blind to it. What we can forget is that that same blindness makes us also less able to see what is wrong with others accurately - although we think we see it just fine we usually are missing some details.

Jesus says to us in the Gospel today: *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?* Well then maybe it is better to just keep our mouth shut and not try to pick a splinter out of someone's eye. Maybe it is best to just admit that we have planks in our eye, so we're really not the best person to pick out someone else's. This sounds like a humble answer, but that's not what Jesus really wants. He's not saying "hey we all have faults, so don't be a hypocrite and say anything to anyone else" - Jesus doesn't

want us to ignore other's faults and not help them overcome them. Love demands that imperfect as we are, we work to help others as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Jesus' real intention is clear when he says: *Remove the wooden beam from your eye first; then you will see clearly to remove the splinter in your neighbor's eye.* He wants us to remove the beam from our eye and clear up our sight. He wants us to listen to the teaching he gives us in the scriptures, in the situations in our lives, and in the things others say to us. Jesus doesn't say "hey you are all kinda blind, don't be leading the other blind people," he wants us to sharpen our sight so that we are less blind and can be of use to him in helping lead others. Clearing our sight is a benefit to us, and allows us to be used as a more effective instrument in the hands of Jesus who wants us all to be healed and gain sight.

This coming Lent be a time for looking at our selves with honesty and sincerely working to remove the planks that block our sight. We learn about how to tell if we are making progress from the first reading. The prophet gives us three tests we can use to examine ourselves and others. First is speech - the prophet says: *When a sieve is shaken, the husks appear; so do one's faults when one speaks.* Some of the faults of Jake were made clear the more he spoke about the casino - but he didn't see it. We can listen to the speech of others to see if they should be guiding us, and listen more closely to our own speech. I know that reflecting on what I say later helps to reveal things I need to work on. The second is to see how one acts in tough times. The prophet says: *As the test of what the potter molds is in the furnace, so in tribulation is the test of the just.* He means that just like when a piece of pottery is fired in the furnace the flaws show - so do humans show flaws during tough times. Finally a point that Jesus echoes in the Gospel: *The fruit of a tree shows the care it has had / For every tree is known by its own fruit.* No matter how good it sounds, no matter how good it looks - what comes as a result is the final test. Does someone have impressive words, seem to be in control in tough times, yet wherever they go there is dissension, fighting, and arguing - the fruit shows the truth.

By paying attention to these signs in ourselves as well as others we can know whom to follow, and help to notice the areas we need to improve so that we can be better examples to others. Removing the planks from our eyes involves some work, but it is worth it. We become sharper in selecting who we follow, we become better individuals overall, and we engage in that work of helping others improve their sight. Let's work at it this Lent, as St. Paul encourages in the second reading: *... be steadfast, always fully devoted to the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.*