

My Dear people of God,

Today we celebrate the Eighth Sunday of Ordinary Time. It is also the last Sunday before we enter the holy season of Lent. Yes, the Lenten season is here, this Wednesday is Ash Wednesday!

The readings for this Sunday continue the schooling of the followers of Jesus (discipleship) as they are fashioned into true disciples. The theme therefore ties in and in away follows up from last Sunday which focused on the way we treat others. The focus today is on deceiving character of outward appearances. The readings today especially the first and gospel insist that there must be a some kind of integrity between one's speech and one's actions. In the first reading we read that just as an orchard is judged by the quality of its fruit, so does a person's talk show what kind of person he is: "***Praise no one before he speaks, for it is then that people are tested.***" This links up with what Jesus says in the gospel: "**A tree is known by its fruit... the words of the mouth flow out of what fills the heart.**"

This Sunday invites us to focus on ourselves as a community of faith. Unlike last Sunday, here it is no longer a question of love of enemies, but of love one one's brothers and sisters in the community. A Christian is his or her brothers/sisters keeper. But one cannot undertake to guide others unless one knows the way oneself. And criticism of others must be preceded by self-criticism.

My dear brothers and sisters, many times it is easy to see the faults of others, but a psychological wall prevents us from seeing our own faults. We can be blind to or deliberately ignore certain facts about ourselves which are perfectly clear to everyone who has ever lived in the same house with us or worked in the same office with us. One of the main things that blind us to our own faults is a pre-occupation with the faults of others. How anxious many times are we to correct others! Without realizing it, we can become fault finders and critics. But as you know, critics are not the ones who reform and transform the world.

There are few things that give as much satisfaction to the ego as pointing out the mistakes and faults of others. *If only we could tell so and so about that fault of his or hers, and get them to see the error of their ways, how happy our lives would be.* When we think like this, we are thinking only of ourselves. But how we hate and dread being corrected ourselves! We find it unbearable, especially if it is done by someone we don't like.

There are times when correction is called for. In fact, some people have that responsibility entrusted to them; parents, teachers, leaders, and elders. As a responsibility, it can be and should be an expression of love. It is most effective, when the one correcting is doing their best to live a clean life so that the one corrected, has an example to follow.

Jesus tells us to take the beam out of our own eyes first and then we can think about removing the splinter from our neighbors eye. In other words, we must put our own house in order first before daring to try to put someone else's house in order. He that would govern others, should first be master of himself. A leader can only lead if he sees the way himself. The teacher can effectively impart only what he himself has learned. The critic who most profits others is a self-critic. If one is to avoid being a blind guide, one must exercise self criticism. One should look long and carefully at oneself before one considers judging others.

My dear brothers and sisters, every day before we end the day, it is a good practice to examine ourselves (Examination of Conscience). This is an act of self criticism. In the same vein, every year, the Church gives us the holy season of Lent as a protracted period of self-examination and renewal. As we enter into the holy season, may we be renewed and cleansed of the beams in our eyes, so that we may be good disciples.

Thanks and God bless,

*Fr Simon Peter*