

March 2—3 Eight Sunday in ordinary time. GO SLOW

If you all haven't guessed **something** about me already, I am a person who reads a lot. I have been a reader all my life, and I am forever grateful to my mother for her example along these lines, and for getting me my first public library card when I was in 3rd Grade. I've been reading ever since.

Recently I came across the books of a Catholic writer named Elizabeth Scalia. She is a current author, she's about my age, she is a third order Dominican or an Oblate as they call themselves, and her books are very relevant to everyday life. They are really **practical**, they offer **solutions** and and most important, they're really short. Here is one of them, this one is called "Little Sins Mean a Lot". Despite how small this book **is**, she covers a **lot of ground**. And it's the ground we **all** walk on, at least I found **myself** described in quite a few of these chapters. The subtitle for this book is "Kicking Our Bad Habits Before they Kick Us."

In each chapter Scalia covers one **very human....very common** little sin. For example— there is chapter on procrastination,

huh?? right? it took me a while to get to that one. There's one on self-neglect, one on gloominess and griping, one on self-indulgence, one on deliberate spite or passive aggressiveness. You get the idea.

Anyway, the interesting thing about this book is the way **she examines each of these things**she explains what each little sin looks like, she uses example to show a few different angles—a lot from her own life, she uses a lot of humor, and then she shows how each of these little things that we often excuse in ourselves can be part of bigger problems.

When I was reading this I found myself say.....“I know I do that sometimes, but the doesn't make me a bad person.” Right....sound familiar?? Well, she shows how each of this little “misdemeanors” are components of, or by-products of **major sins**. You know, what we as Christians know as **capital sins** or the 7 deadly ones. Pride, Greed, Lust, Envy, Gluttony, Wrath, and Sloth. This book has really opened my eyes to the extent that I do little things in subtle ways I didn't really recognize, that could mushroom into bigger things.

So the reason I share this is not only to recommend the book... **I got it on line by the way used... for a three dollars and change. The reason** is that Scalia's approach —or I would call it her teaching style, is this: (she keeps it light, she uses humor, then she shows how the small sins are connected to the big ones)— that approach is **exactly** what Jesus does in today's gospel.

In the first part of the Gospel Jesus is talking to his newer disciples. These are the ones who just might be still a little full of themselves, they might be impressed with their new found **status** as disciples, they're becoming a bit "holier than thou." To help them see it, Jesus uses this comical exaggeration, right? You're noticing the sliver in your buddies eye, but how about the log in your own eye.

The message here is... that everyone... has...an... individual faith journey. We all have a **developing faith**. And we shouldn't compare ourselves with someone else at a different stage in their faith development. If we have a habit of placing any judgment there, it's kind of like saying a 6th grader is **better** than a fourth grader. There **is** no

difference! There is no difference in the individuals themselves, they're just at a different stage in the journey.

As Christians we can look at our journey—we can look at the trials in our lives as opportunities for learning. With an open mind to the message of the Gospel and an open heart to the Holy Spirit the Christian faith journey is indeed a type of training experience. Just like Jesus says in the gospel, if we listen to him and heed what he says, we will become more like him. We don't have to be the blind leading the blind. What a relief!! We should be grateful for this and take heart because our faith represents a constant movement through life, growth in the spirit, with the help of the power of the Spirit.

So, Jesus corrects the disciples for their unfair judgement of others, then he connects what he is saying to a much .. more .. serious .. and sinful condition. He says. "A good person out of the store of goodness in his heart produces good, but an evil person out of a store of evil produces evil; for from the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks." think about that....**from the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks.**"

There are 3 little sins in Scalia's book that pertain to what happens when we give voice to negative stuff in the heart. They would be "Gloominess and Gripping," "Judgement and Suspicion" and "Gossip" if we allow any of these it to survive unchecked and eventually fill our hearts, then we **can** begin to give voice to them- we give voice through the mouth, as Jesus says— and when we do this, unfortunately we slide into a hurtful existence. We can drag others down with our gloominess, we can become judgmental and lonely, or we can end up slandering our friends, neighbors and family. When this happens, it's a lot more than a bad mental habit, these have become things we should be talking about in the confessional and praying for the wisdom and courage to change.

So let's take the habit of gossip for example. Pope Francis said this about gossip: "Gossip always has a criminal side to it. There is no such thing as innocent gossip.... Some may say that there are persons that deserve being gossiped about. But **it is not so.**" WOW!

Nobody **deserves** to be gossiped about—**Why is that?** ... **because** gossip destroys a person's reputation. Each one of us as our

Heavenly Father's favored creations, all deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. The CCC, another book I'd highly recommend, provides a great description of the results of uncharitable speech. it says this: "Respect for the reputation of persons forbids every attitude and word likely to cause them unjust injury. [we] become[] guilty: of **rash judgement** [if we] even tacitly, assume as true, without sufficient foundation, the moral fault of a neighbor; [we] become[] guilty: of **detraction** [if we] without objectively valid reason disclose another's faults and failing to persons who did not know them; [and we become guilty] of **calumny** (which is slander or defamation of character) [if we] by remarks contrary to the truth, harm[] the reputation of others and give occasion for false judgments concerning them." —encouraging or perpetuating a story.

I think we have a natural **human tendency** to categorize others and if we don't care for the category we put them in, we dismiss others in judgement, rather than allowing for differences and working to express goodwill, and tolerance. Many of us do this without thinking. But if we ask the Spirit to help us—to show us where we may be doing it

—we can root out this out this problem. We can improve these little sins before they become big ones.

But then, What can we do when we encounter other people talking like this? After all this could be the conversation we hear around the water cooler at work.

Here's some advise from really good sources: **St. Francis DeSales says this:** When you hear ill of anyone, refute the accusation if you can in justice do so; If not, apologize for the accused on account of his intentions..and thus gently check the conversation, and if you can, mention something else favorable to the accused.

St John Vianny says this: If something uncharitable is said in your presence, either speak in favor of the absent [person] or withdraw, or if possible, stop the conversation.

And Elizabeth Scalia, in her little book says: Ask yourself, “Would I want someone talking about me in this way” if the answer is no, you're probably gossiping.

I really believe that the Holy Spirit orchestrates the opportunities for growth in our lives so that we encounter the right information at the

right time, for our benefit and for the greater glory of God. So I'm grateful for today's gospel and for Ms Scalia's book because it really helped me look at my own habits and recognize where I need to clear up my heart. I'd like to close with a prayer: Come holy spirit fill the hearts of your faithful with wisdom, and bless our efforts to change. Help us to be better disciples. Amen.