

## The 8th Sunday of Ordinary Time (March 3)

What a delightful selection of readings we have set before us today! How rich as we continue the theme from last week's Gospel ..... 'Loving my Enemies' being able to Identify 'my Enemy' more clearly, and determining who/where is that Enemy ...out there, or is that enemy within me? Last week, I invited you to look at the size of your screen ....no, not your T.V. Screen but rather your Life-Screen .... when you look out on your world..... how large is your screen ? Do I perhaps need a Larger ... Better Screen to see this Wonderful world He has given us ????

I hope you had the opportunity to take time to really reflect on your Personal Screen Size ! The Readings this week continue the same theme and are a marvelous compliment to the Lenten Study that we are following ..... Respectable Sins ..... Confronting the sins we Tolerate !! There are a large number of sins that we tolerate rather easily in ourselves. Indeed, we may also tolerate them in others because we are afraid to address them with a friend.

Each week during our Small Groups, we will be reflecting on either two or three of these sins. The great and wonderful thing about this study is that it is an invitation to become aware of these sins, and thus we have an opportunity to do something about them. We can begin a new process of not overlooking them any longer, perhaps being blind to them, and thus not doing anything to change the situation, or improve myself. If a sin is causing a significant degree of discomfort in my life and keeping me from growing ..... wouldn't I want to eradicate it?

I think we have created a kind of illusion through the Sacrament of Reconciliation that, if I just go to confession then I have taken care

of that problem, that situation. Not true. That would be a very immature perspective for one who is seriously committed to growing their Personal Relationship with Jesus Christ.

Growing my relationship with Jesus involves confessing my sins indeed, but also requires a firm purpose of amendment, and a commitment to try and change the behavior or pattern that I have just confessed ! To not be committed to improving myself, and changing a behavior would be something akin to my withdrawing cash from the bank, (the source of my investment) and then refusing, or choosing to not spend the money. Just doesn't make sense.

So, throughout our Lenten Season, we are going to be looking at sins that we have easily tolerated throughout our lives, and not done anything to change or improve my situation. I just kind of accept my situation, and say to myself ..... 'Well that's just the way I am' ..... deal with it ! There is so much more available.

Our Readings today are pretty special as we prepare to begin our Lenten Season. The 1st Reading from the Book of Sirach :

*"When a sieve is shaken, the husks appear; So do one's fault's when one speaks. As the test of what the potter molds is in the furnace, so in tribulation is the test of the just. The fruit of a tree shows the care it has had, so too does one's speech disclose the bent of one's mind. Praise no one before he speaks, for it is then that people are tested."*

Wow ..... what a beautiful and delightful reflection !!!!

What I speak tells a lot about who I am, and where my heart really is ! And as a test, if many people checked their speech, they may pass the test ..... they might say something like 'well I am not guilty of any Big Sins, maybe I am guilty of Gossip, or slanderous talk

about others, but it really wasn't too bad. And here's a real live kicker .... well, what I said was true .....I made up none of it .... It's absolutely true ....and so I duly absolve myself!

As Lee Corso likes to say in the football commentaries, "Not so fast my friend." You see, the real issue is not whether I can absolve myself. The real issue is do I expect my God to absolve me ??? He will certainly absolve me .....but how can I grow my relationship with Him if I show no desire to amend my behavior? Now, that's a very different question !!!! What the author in Sirach is really saying is that God see and hears both what I say and what I do, and He sees and knows my heart. *"The fruit of a tree shows the care it has had, so too does one's speech disclose the bent of ones mind"*

Wow .....what can I say ???????

Here is 'the rub' ..... the Gospel puts it in clear and plain language : *"A good tree does not bear rotten fruit, nor does a rotten tree bear good fruit. For every tree is known by its own fruit. For people do not pick figs from thorn bushes, nor do they gather grapes from brambles. 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."*

How is My Speech ??? How is YOUR FRUIT ??????

This week, the 2 sins we are reflecting on are : Ungodliness and Unthankfulness. I am sure we are not used to hearing the word 'Ungodliness' in our Catholic Churches .....We might easily see it as a kind of word we would hear from Evangelical preachers. But in truth, it is something we talk a great deal about in our Catholic Tradition, but may not very often use that term. By Ungodliness we mean not being sufficiently aware of or attentive to God in the course of our daily routine, our work, our

lives, our vocation. I have often asked you, ‘How aware are you of God in the mundane activities of your daily life?’ That’s a pretty important question for one who is really seeking to be in, or live in Christ Jesus. The sin of Ungodliness is pretty far-ranging ... it moves from giving some serious attention to God in my daily life, to giving no thought whatsoever to my creator.

Let me give you an example: St. Ignatius the great founder of the Jesuits had many rules for the members of his Jesuit Community .... the discipline of the Church and praying the Hours of the Church ..... Morning, Mid-day, Evening Prayer ..... Night Prayer.... and then “The Examen.” He made it known that the members could be excused for missing one of the Hours, but nobody was excused from the Examen at the end of the day. The Examen was to be a healthy examination of conscience at the end of a day. Its purpose was to assist the community members in becoming aware of how God was present in their lives throughout the day. It had a further dimension to try and help people engage in a discernment of spirits — what spirit was moving them throughout their day. What new plans did they have for the Holy Spirit to move them in days ahead?

George Aschenbrenner, a great teacher, member of the Jesuit community, and thus a confrere of St. Ignatius of Loyola, had a wonderful insight into the whole experience of ‘The Examen.’ He suggested a new approach. He proposed that the real benefits of the Examen had somehow become lost in the passage of time. He suggested, why not look at the Examen, not as an Examination of Conscience, but rather as an Examination of Consciousness. In other words, let’s turn this experience totally around. Instead of examining our conscience (at which many Catholics are already adept), lets rather call this an Examen of Consciousness ..... How

conscious was I of God throughout my day? When I got up this morning, when I got myself ready for my day, when I went to drive to work, when I settled into my workday, my encounters, my experiences, my engagements and meetings with others, my journey home, my experience at home with family. In how many of those instances was I truly conscious of God's presence?

He had a marvelous understanding of how we could use the Examen as a powerful tool for our day! At the end of the day, simply ask yourself regarding all of the above activities, how much was God present in each of these encounters? A simple suggestion he had was just balance the "I" and the "We." Was it "I" or "We" that engaged in each of these activities? Brilliant thoughts !

A thought came back to me of a prayer book which we assembled while I was in seminary. It was simply a compilation of the favorite prayers that individuals wanted to include. I remember submitting the following by an Unknown Author. It had certainly piqued my interest. Sometimes it is referred to as: The Difference !

### **Time to Pray**

—Fr. Gerry Hurley

I got up early one morning  
and rushed right into the day;  
I had so much to accomplish  
that I didn't have time to pray.

Problems just tumbled about me,  
and heavier came each task.  
"Why doesn't God help me?" I wondered.  
He answered, "You didn't ask."

I wanted to see joy and beauty,  
but the day toiled on, gray and bleak;  
I wondered why God didn't show me.  
He said, "But you didn't seek."

I tried to come into God's presence;  
I used all my keys at the lock.  
God gently and lovingly chided,  
"My child, you didn't knock."

I woke up early this morning,  
and paused before entering the day;  
I had so much to accomplish  
that I had to take time to pray.

Author unknown