

Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time - Lectionary: 84

Reading I - [Sirach 27:4-7](#)

When a sieve is shaken, the husks appear; so do one's faults 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.

Responsorial Psalm - [Psalm 92:2-3, 13-14, 15-16](#) R (cf. 2a) Lord, it is good to give thanks to you.

Reading II - [1 Corinthians 15:54-58](#)

Brothers and sisters: When this which is corruptible clothes itself with incorruptibility and this which is mortal clothes itself with immortality, then the word that is written shall come about: Death is swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, my beloved brothers and sisters, be firm, steadfast, always fully devoted to the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

Gospel - [Luke 6:39-45](#)

Jesus told his disciples a parable, "Can a blind person guide a blind person? Will not both fall into a pit? No disciple is superior to the teacher; but when fully trained, every disciple will be like his teacher. 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? You hypocrite! Remove the wooden beam from your eye first; then you will see clearly to remove the splinter in your brother's eye.

"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 thornbushes, 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."

Who do you follow, how do you lead...

Today we reflect on the readings for the Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time, which emphasize the importance of discerning true wisdom in both us and those we follow. It explores the connection between inner character and outward speech, suggesting that our words reveal the cultivation of our minds. The use of metaphors such as of trees and fruit, in the readings, illustrate how good deeds and virtues stem from a well-nurtured heart and cultivated life. They caution against hypocrisy, mental and spiritual blindness, urging self-awareness and the purification of our hearts as essential for authentic teaching and discipleship. Finally, we reflect on the fruits of the spirit and the importance of our personal responsibility to cultivate those fruits.

I think it's important that we understand a little about the relationship between Jewish teachers and their students. As Jesus would have been aware, it is characterized by a deep commitment to personal connection, moral and ethical instruction, and holistic development. Teachers were not only educators but also mentors and role models who played a crucial role in shaping the identity and values of their students within the context of Jewish tradition. This relationship was essential for fostering a sense of community and continuity in Jewish education, ensuring that the teachings and values of Judaism were passed down effectively through generations.¹

The teacher needed to be wise. A man who was sensible and prudent: identifiable by how he spoke since as we know from our own experience, once we open our mouth, we reveal ourselves. This is why Sirach says we “{ought not} *praise anyone before he speaks, for this is the way people are tested.*” Such a wise person would know how to speak the truth in the right way at the right time, so that his conversation would be ordered by his righteousness and shaped by his virtue, even when others try to lower the moral tone.²

As we heard in the Gospel reading, Jesus says, “*when fully trained, every disciple [student] will be like his teacher.*” We should ask ourselves who are we following, allowing to form our hearts and minds. In both the first reading and the Gospel, we are being cautioned to be clear headed about the kind of person we are following, allowing to teach us and form our minds as well as to be very careful about what we are teaching other who follow us. Jesus asks, rhetorically, “*Can a blind person guide a blind person?*” The blind would be those without understanding, how could they presume to give leadership to others who are also blind / without understanding? The result, he says, is inevitable: “*Will not both fall into a pit?*” We need to walk in the footsteps of people who can see by the light of truth and be the person for others to follow in the same way. As leaders and teachers of others, we need to acknowledge our own blindness, our blind spots, our myopia, our biases and lack of objectivity... and do something about it.

Sirach gives us an image to explain how it is we can recognize true wisdom and an authentic teacher as well as how to ensure our own words are rightly ordered according to truth. He says, “*When a sieve is shaken, the husks appear; so do one's faults when one speaks.*” He invites us to be the “sieve” of our words as well as the words of others. Words taken up by Jesus as he reminds us that we must “sift” our own words since the wooden beam in our eye will impair our ability to discern the good from evil. For those unaware of what a sieve is, it is device that separates the desirable from the undesirable or makes what passes through it more refined.

In life, it is not at all unusual to hear people speak with great authority as though they are experts on things of which they often know very little. In a Christian community there might be ‘armchair’ theologians,

¹ <https://archive.org/details/07470918.6.emory.edu/page/n3>

² Michael Adams, trans., *Wisdom Books*, The Navarre Bible (Dublin; New York: Four Courts Press; Scepter Publishing, 2004), 474.

liturgists or moralists who think they know more than all the great thinkers and saints throughout the history of the Church. If we are going to be able to recognize and follow the wise teacher, and ourselves be wise teachers, it is essential that we purify our speech by purifying the heart, *“for from the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks.”*

There must be integration of speech and action, continuity between the heart – the ultimate source of human behavior – and the external action that flows from it. The authentic ‘you’, your character and faith can be gleaned easily from your speech. The instruction of Jesus, using the image of a tree and its fruits, is telling us to get the heart right and all else will fall into place. Sirach emphasized this saying, *“the fruit discloses the cultivation of a tree; so a person’s speech discloses the cultivation of his mind.”* ^{Sirach 27: 6}

What makes the tree good or bad is the care taken in its cultivation. This should recall the parable of ‘The Barren Fig Tree’ found later in the Gospel of Luke. The landowner comes to the gardener and says, *“Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?”* ^{Lk 13:7} But the gardener replies, *“Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.”* ^{Lk 13:8-9} So, too, with our human heart: it needs to be cultivated, if it, too, is to produce good things.

“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 thornbushes, nor do they gather grapes from brambles.” Commonly speaking, fruit is something real and concrete that most ordinary people can recognize as good or bad. The word “fruit” in Catholic Tradition is used to refer to a spectrum of related but different things:

1. The interior spiritual consolations that a person may experience as he or she follows Jesus as a disciple.
2. Fruits of the Spirit. Catholic Tradition follows the Vulgate in listing twelve fruits: attributes or characteristics of the Christian life: charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, chastity.
3. All personal internal and external acts of obedience and cooperation with grace.
4. What God accomplishes or offers others *through* our acts of obedience (the fruit of our fruit, so to speak).³

Dogmatic theologian Ludwig Ott summed up the interior dynamic of fruit-bearing this way: “the subjective disposition of the recipient is ... the indispensable pre-condition of the communication of grace.” Infants cannot put obstacles in the way of receiving grace, but older children, teens, and adults certainly can. The obstacles that can block the ultimate fruitfulness of valid sacraments include:

- Lack of personal faith.
- Lack of understanding.
- Lack of a desire to live a new life.
- Lack of repentance.⁴

Fruit-bearing is the primary indicator that everything that Christ accomplished for us is actually reaching us, penetrating, and changing us. Bearing fruit is the sign that salvation has come to our house and is actually occurring in our lives. No wonder Pope St. John Paul II said: Bearing fruit is an essential demand of life in Christ

³ Sherry A. Weddell, *Fruitful Discipleship: Living the Mission of Jesus in the Church and the World* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2017), 33–34.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

and life in the Church. The person who does not bear fruit does not remain in communion: “Each branch of mine that bears no fruit, he (my Father) takes away” (Jn 15:2).⁵

As we become increasingly able to reason and understand, it becomes increasingly essential that we take responsibility for our education and formation; for the growth of good spiritual, moral, and intellectual fruits that become manifest in our actions. As well, this is the only authentic foundation for becoming a good teacher and being able to recognize a good teacher worthy of being followed.

Study Guide

I. Key Themes

- **Discernment and Judgment:** The readings emphasize the importance of careful judgment, both of oneself and others, particularly in assessing character and truthfulness.
- **The Relationship Between Teacher and Disciple:** Explores the qualities of a good teacher and the responsibility of disciples to choose wise mentors who embody moral and ethical principles.
- **The Connection Between Inner Character and Outward Actions:** Highlights the idea that a person's words and deeds are reflections of their inner state, especially the condition of the heart.
- **The Need for Self-Reflection and Purification:** Encourages individuals to examine their own faults and biases before attempting to correct others, focusing on personal growth as a prerequisite for effective guidance.
- **Bearing Fruit:** Underscores that a life lived according to Christian principles should produce tangible results, both internally and externally, as evidence of salvation and communion with God.

III. Reflection Questions

1. Discuss the role of a teacher or mentor, according to the readings, and how one can discern a true and wise teacher from a false one.
2. Explore the concept of self-reflection in the context of the readings. How does examining one's own faults contribute to personal growth and better relationships with others?
3. Analyze the connection between inner character and outward actions as presented in the readings. How can one cultivate a heart that produces good fruit in their words and deeds?
4. Examine the concept of bearing fruit as a sign of salvation and communion with God. What does it mean to "bear fruit" in a Christian context, and how can one overcome obstacles to fruitfulness?
5. How do the readings challenge individuals to take responsibility for their own education and spiritual formation? Consider the implications for both personal growth and the ability to guide others effectively.

IV. Glossary of Key Terms

- **Discernment:** The ability to judge well, to distinguish between truth and falsehood, right and wrong.
- **Fruit (Spiritual):** Tangible results or manifestations of a life lived according to Christian principles, including internal consolations, virtuous behavior, and external acts of obedience and service.

⁵ Ibid, 40–41.

- **Fruits of the Spirit:** Attributes or characteristics of the Christian life, such as charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, and chastity.
- **Grace:** God's free and undeserved gift of his loving presence in our lives, which empowers us to live according to his will.
- **Hypocrisy:** The practice of claiming to have moral standards or beliefs to which one's own behavior does not conform.
- **Myopia:** Nearsightedness, or in a metaphorical sense, a lack of foresight or broad perspective.
- **Repentance:** Sincere regret or remorse for one's sins or wrongdoings, accompanied by a desire to turn away from them and live a better life.
- **Sieve:** A device used for separating desirable elements from unwanted ones; metaphorically, a process of discernment and purification.
- **Sirach:** Also known as the Book of Ecclesiasticus, a wisdom book from the Old Testament that offers practical advice on virtuous living and wise decision-making.
- **Steadfast:** Resolutely or dutifully firm and unwavering.