

HOMILY

FEBRUARY 26-27, 2022

EIGHTH SUNDAY ORDINARY TIME

A tourist meets a pirate in a country pub. Curious about the pirate's appearance – an artificial leg, a hook and an eye patch – he asks: "How did you end up with the peg-leg?" The pirate replies, "It was a stormy night, and I fell into shark-infested waters. One shark took my leg off." "Oh!" the tourist gasps. "That's terrible! And what about your hook?" "Well," replies the pirate, "A sword of an enemy cut off my hand. I had to make my arm useful, nonetheless. So, there's the hook." "Wow!" remarks the tourist. "But how about the eye patch?" "An ant bit my eyelid," replies the pirate. "You mean, you lost your eye because of one ant?" the tourist asks in disbelief. "Well," says the pirate, "it was just a few hours after my hook was installed." The pirate, though, has reason to be thankful. He still has one good eye.

"Can a blind person guide a blind person? Will not both fall into a pit?" This is the question posed by Jesus in the Gospel today. To be blind is very unfortunate. But there is something worse than physical blindness. And this is what the Lord is telling us: *"Why do you notice the splinter in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own?"*

Many people have perfect and keen eyesight, but that is only when they look for other people's mistakes. But when it comes to their own sins and mistakes, they are blind. It is as if a big wooden beam blocks their eyes. That 'wooden beam' is none other than pride.

A proud person looks down on other people. He thinks he is the best person in the world. Everybody else is of less worth. In the spiritual life, he assumes the holier-than-thou attitude. He is convinced of his own holiness and the certainty of eternal salvation!

The Lord has an accurate word for this: hypocrisy. This is the reason why Jesus continually lashes out at the Scribes and Pharisees: *"Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You are like whitewashed tombs, which appear beautiful on the outside, but inside are full of dead men's bones and every kind of filth."* (Mt 23:27)

There is the story about little Johnny who was lost at a large shopping mall. "Mommy, Mommy!" he cried. An elderly lady saw him and consoled him. "Come with me," she said, "and I'll buy you an ice cream. Then we will look for your Mommy." A small girl heard this. She approached Johnny and whispered, "I know where your Mommy is." **"Shh!"** Johnny hushed her. "I know where she is, too, but I've managed to get two free ice creams this morning, and I want a third!"

Johnny is a good actor. And that is what hypocrisy means. The word “**hypocrite**” comes from the Greek word which means ‘actor.’ On the stage, an actor takes on a character that is different from his own person. Everything he does is only for show.

This warning of Jesus does not mean we have to attain perfect holiness first before we do something to help others. Otherwise, no one would take on the task of leading, guiding and teaching others. After all, nobody is perfect. All of us have our own sins, weaknesses and failures. Rather, the Lord wants us to be reminded always of all these so that we may avoid falling into the trap of blinding pride.

Humility is the most basic and necessary foundation for genuine holiness. This virtue, no matter how unattractive to many people, enables us to see clearly who we truly are – our faults, sins and ugliness and also our talents, innate goodness and dignity. In other words, humility is always closely related to truth. It does not mean a humble person should just be sulking in a corner, sorry for all his faults and indulging in self-pity. It means awareness and acceptance of our giftedness and capacities to do good and help.

This is what the Apostle Paul points out in the Second Reading. He reminds us in his Letter to the Corinthians that we are limited, sinful and corruptible. But this is not an excuse to do nothing. There is always certain hope for a better tomorrow, when what *“is corruptible clothes itself with incorruptibility and this which is mortal clothes itself with immortality.”* There is always the assurance of our victory: *“But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* Hence, his challenge to all of us to *“be firm, steadfast, always fully devoted to the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.”* (1Cor 15:54-58)

In closing, Jesus gives us His marching order: strive hard to be faithful to our original dignity as the good tree, bearing abundant good fruits. Then we will be known as true children of God and authentic followers of Jesus Christ. Are our eyes still blocked by a ‘big wooden beam’ of pride? Let the words of admonition from St. Augustine help us realize the great value of humility in our life:

“The way to Christ is first through humility, second through humility, and third through humility. If humility does not precede and accompany and follow every good work we do, if it is not before us to focus on, if it is not beside us to lean on, if it is not behind us to fence us in, pride will wrench from our hand any good deed we do at the very moment we do it.”

In Christ,
Deacon Don