

**Homily for the 8th Sunday in Ordinary Time- Year C**  
St Peter's 9:30 & 11:30 Masses – March 3, 2019

Sirach 27: 4-7 "The test of the just person is in tribulation" "Do not praise a man before hearing his message."

Psalm 92 "The righteous flourish like the palm ... Lord, it is good to give thanks to you."

1 Corinthians 15: 54-58 "Thanks be to God who gives us victory through Jesus Christ."

Luke 6: 39-45 "It is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks."

**Your Character is Showing**

**Introduction**

Marla Runyan is well named. She is a runner. She has also been blind since she was nine. That didn't stop her, in the year 2000, from becoming the first legally blind athlete to compete in the Olympics. She did pretty well too. Marla's philosophy is that if she works hard enough, she can overcome anything.

Eric Weihenmayer has a similar story. He became the first blind person to climb Mt Everest, in 2001, and has a long list of accomplishments since. He believes that the challenges of life can build character, avoid laziness, and unleash potential. He would likely agree with the writer of Sirach, that tribulation is the test of the just person, the good person, and that it forms a person's character.

I can also say that the blind people in my life are pretty amazing. So, we could ask why it appears that Jesus looks down on blindness. He tells us that a blind person leading another with the same limitation is a very bad idea. And, he uses the very funny image of a log in the eye blinding someone about his own faults while trying to point out the faults of others.

**On Faults and Character**

Because Jesus repeats the message three times, we can bet that this idea of blindness is really really important for him. On the one hand, the meaning seems quite simple. Don't go trying to tell other people their faults when you have so many yourself. And, not just a lot of them, but they are as big as a log or a wooden timber stuck in your eye. He calls hypocrites those who go around 'fixing' other peoples' character flaws instead of working on their own.

There are two problems with this behaviour. One is that we really need to be building our own character first before working on others. The other problem is that we aren't going to see what will really help others grow into better people because we are kind of blinded by our own faults and weakness.

What the saints find as they grow in holiness is that they become more and more aware of their faults. They recognize that they have a lot more logs in their eyes than they even imagined.

### **On Blindness and Character**

Looking more closely at this issue of blindness, Jesus uses this image to point out that, if one can't physically see, it would be best to seek out someone who can in order to avoid physical dangers, or pitfalls.

But Jesus is not just talking about someone falling in a hole. He is also talking about another kind of sight. If we want to be closer to God, it will not help us to follow someone who is neither close to God, nor interested in pursuing a relationship with God. Having trusted the wrong person or the wrong idea we will be lost.

Now the closer any of us gets to God, the more we are going to be able to see everything that happens to us here from God's perspective. Soon, we won't fall into a spiritual hole of sin and will grow in virtue and character.

As always, the answer is Jesus Christ himself. One saint (Gregory of Nyssa) says we shall be blessed with clear vision if we keep our eyes fixed on Christ. The one who keeps his eyes upon the head and origin of the whole universe has them on virtue in all its perfection, for Christ is goodness itself. Paul says, in effect, that we are blind to the life here below because our eyes are raised toward the One who is our head.

And Christ himself said: I am the light of the world. He who follows me will not walk in darkness but will possess the light of life. He made the blind see. Now we see his light with the eyes of our spirit.

### **On Trial and Character**

When you talk to people of deep prayerful lives, or read the writings of those who are advanced in holiness, there is a feeling that they experience the trials of life differently than others. They see suffering as a door to the greater experience of God's love. They see the victory over that suffering. In other words, they have greater vision. That's what St. Paul is talking about when he cries out that death itself has been defeated. The term he uses is that death has been "swallowed up in victory."

I hate it that I can no longer read without glasses, but Jesus is not accusing me about that. He will accuse me if I don't learn how to become a better person through faith, and help others to do the same.

The Psalm says that the righteous flourish like the palm tree, producing fruit, even in old age. Our lives are about building the kind of character that keeps growing in value.

Ultimately we are not thanking God because of how wonderful our lives have been, but because God is the holiness, that we have grown into.

### **On Speaking and Character**

Mark Twain famously said, it is better to be silent and be thought a fool, than to open your mouth and remove all doubt. In the book of Sirach, we read that our words, our speech, reveal the person we are, including our faults. Speech is the fruit of our character.

St. Augustine hated the public speeches of his time. Speakers would use all kinds of rhetorical devices and arguments to convince their listeners of a certain point of view, even if they didn't really care one way or another. It was just a game to them. Augustine was part of that world but he was hungering for words that would express deeper meaning and not just be ways of manipulating others.

When he became a Christian, he realized that those speakers were using powerful techniques for a useless purpose, whereas we have the message of the Good News, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And so, he declared he would never again use those rhetorical techniques except in defense of the Gospels and to explain Sacred Scripture.

Today, we have a kind of public debate on various kinds of media, but the winners are based on personal opinions, and who shouts the loudest. That's why those of us for the family and for life from conception to natural death are accused of being backward and full of hatred. But if we have the courage to speak out, our character will reflect the God of life of love.

### **On Eternity and Character**

Paul tells us that our destiny is to go from what is perishable to what will never rot, and from mortality to what will never die. At the heart of our faith is that death and bodily limits are transcended by God's presence in our lives. Sin in our lives is the real death, but thanks be to God that the Lord gives us victory in Jesus Christ.

Without God leading us, the value of our labours is determined by the world. But, in the Lord, Paul says we can be assured that our efforts are not in vain, even if it may so seem so because the world has judged us through a giant plank.

### **On Discipleship and Character**

A disciple is to become like the teacher. If we are to be disciples of Christ, we must become like him, not all at once, perhaps, but even a little at a time. If that is not our task, then we are only pretending to be disciples.

If I have been blessed in life and have many things, realize that these things do not bring ultimate satisfaction. I must turn to Christ. It is he who is my satisfaction. Or, if I have

nothing and am bowed down under the weight of disappointment, it is Christ who lifts me up.

Catholic Christian Outreach, CCO, has a diagram for the relationship with Christ:

1. Christ is outside of my life. I may have awareness of him, but he has no influence in my life.
2. Christ is a part of my life along with all of the things I think and do. This is probably where most of us are.
3. Christ is at the centre of my life, influencing everything I do. That's the disciple.

### **The Call To Lenten Renewal**

Lent starts this Wednesday. What efforts can we make this Lent which will bring Christ more into the centre of our life and build character with Him as our guide?

What not to do. If you are addicted to caffeine, don't give up chocolate or coffee. Your friends will not thank you. But here are a few ideas:

1. Ash Wednesday is a universal day of fasting and abstinence from meat. What that symbolizes is a desire to fast from our faults. Begin to take the log out so we can see the character we want to build through these 40 days.
2. Look for spiritual guides in our life. That is first Christ of course. We could do this by reflecting even for five minutes a day on Scripture. But also look for one person who might be a guide for you and consciously bring that person closer.
3. Ask God to come into even one trial in your life. Say, Lord this thing has challenged and defeated me. I look to you to be my strength.
4. Once in awhile, just listen where I am used to speaking. See if I can hear what's going on in someone's life before talking.
5. If we want to prepare for eternity, there is no other way than prayer. This is the lifeline. Without a real relationship with the Lord whom I claim to love, but I spend no time with him, that relationship is in vain.
6. Finally, in our midst are baptized candidates preparing for their reception into the Church. Catechumens are about to be enrolled as members of the elect and begin their final period of purification and preparation for their baptism at the Easter Vigil. As they look around at the Church they will profess, let them find, in us, disciples, a people becoming like our Lord and guide, Jesus Christ.