**EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**

**February 27th 2022**

**First Reading Ben Sirach 27:4-7**

Some parts of the wisdom literature are highly controversial or speculative; other parts such as to-day’s consist of simple common-sense observations on human behaviour and a moral sense. Jesus ben Sirach’s book abounds in practical religious advice from about 150 B.C.

Here, in four pictures drawn from daily life he makes the point that a person's talk reveals what he thinks. The moral is also illustrated by Jesus' words read in today's gospel: 'Every tree can be told by its own fruit’.

Our innermost thoughts may be revealed by our outermost actions. If we think of Jesus as an innovative revolutionary, we must also recall that much of his teaching was traditional and uncontroversial.

**Responsorial Psalm: 92:1-2, 12-15**

This psalm of thanksgiving deals with the theme of moral retribution. Yahweh is praised for his mighty deeds, especially in rewarding the righteous with prosperity, so that they become like fruitful trees. The psalm expresses the deeply held traditional view that faithfulness is rewarded and wickedness punished. (See especially Psalm 37;25 which I read only with gritted teeth)

Such simplistic ideas persisted (even till our own times) despite all the evidence and anguished indignant voices. Nevertheless there is a truth to be derived from this attitude and that is a conviction of the nature of God. The belief is, despite all the evidence to the contrary, that there is a moral foundation to Creation and that not everything that happens in it is God’s will. There are lone voices of protest, in Psalm 73 and the Book of Job for example.

**Second Reading 1 Corinthians 15:54-58**

Throughout chapter 15 Paul has been speaking of the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of believers which follows on from it. The final resurrection will be the completion of Christ's victory over sin and death.

The first Christians were of the mind that nothing happened without God leaving clues beforehand in the writings of the Hebrew prophets. The idea of life after death came late to the Hebrews about 180 B.C. about the time of ben Sirach’s birth, but long after the prophets. So the germ of the idea must have been buried deep in the subconscious. Contemplating this, Paul cannot help seeing in the resurrection the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy: 'Death shall be no more' (Isaiah 25:8; see Revelation 21:4).

Death, which once was a tyrant, has in the words of the prophet Hosea (13:14), lost its sting. The Parousia will be the great moment when Death is finally and definitively vanquished. In other places, Paul groups together Death with Sin and Torah Law (three tyrannical powers) as he does in the first paragraph of our reading (v. 56) to-day. Sin leads to the self-centredness that stands in opposition to the life of God; it is the way that ends in 'death'.

In his difficult phrase, ‘*sin gets its power from the law*’ Paul is thinking of the widespread obedience to the Torah that Jesus bitterly contested with the Pharisees.

Blind obedience to the Law allows people to shirk responsibility to make personal decisions - which responsible freedom is the only way of authentic being.

In Christ the baptised have already been freed from Sin and the Law (Romans 6:17-18 and 7:7) and at the Parousia they will be freed from Death also. At the prospect, Paul breaks into thanksgiving (v. 57). In conclusion he assures his Christians that they have access to such encouragement and grace through Jesus and his Spirit who is at work in us, that all the labour can be endured. The work we achieve is the work of the Lord within us, who is able to make all difficulties bearable.

**Gospel Luke 6:39-45**

Last week’s Gospel (6:37-42) spoke of the love a disciple of Jesus should have for his (or her) enemies. This week the focus switches to those naturally closer, teachers and fellow disciples. Our passage voices the concern of each disciple for the welfare of all disciples -- a Christian has concern for one's brother and sister. These words were taken from the family context and applied to fellow-Christians but with a greater severity. (Luke 14;26)

In 2022, and for many years past, Christianity has been seen as a waning influence in society, even by its own proponents. This mood is totally inadequate in helping us to understand the fanatical spirit that bound together the Christians of the first three centuries. Then it drove many to regard their agonizing deaths with a pride and privilege that astonished the authorities.

Matthew and Luke used the same material for their Gospels, but sometimes used it differently. Their reasons depended on the audience they were targeting. Matthew gives the original context of the opening sentence in the reading from Luke’s version of the same saying that we have used. The blind leaders (Matthew 15:12-14 and Luke 6:39) are the Pharisees.

But the next words in Luke apply the lesson to the contemporary leaders of the Christian community. Luke has developed the idea through a rather vague association of ideas. Blindness can result from anything the size of a splinter to a rafter in the eye which gives a range of degree in understanding sinfulness. Not all sinfulness has the same severity as was recognised by the old categories of mortal and venial sin.

Luke, seemingly, understands this picture to mean that one cannot undertake to guide others until one has a good grasp of the Christian way of life oneself. To avoid being a blind guide one must exercise self-criticism (end of second paragraph).

The succeeding passage requires that the true Christian teacher must be a genuinely good person. The saying about the two trees was originally a warning against false prophets (as in Matthew 7:15), which in Luke has become a recommendation addressed to the disciples: the goodness of a person is known by the quality of fruit that is borne.

With the preceding message in mind this may mean that only a good disciple can win good converts. In v. 45 we have two sayings which are found, in inverse order but in a similar context, in Matthew 2:34¬35. While the fruits of Luke 6:43-44 are 'good works', those of v. 45 are 'words'; the addition was made on the grounds of the recurrence of 'good' and 'evil.' Luke draws attention to good works (authentic and sound teaching) as to a special type of 'good fruit.'

This teaching certainly comes from Jesus. But we hear it through his disciples’ best efforts in implementing it in their local congregations. And their leaders clearly considered it within their remit to correct and reprove members even using of them critical language that Jesus used of his enemies.

Also, it may seem untactful that Luke, who desired to bring together diverse parties in the Church, should repeat such abrasive sentences. But forthrightness is no crime. To conceal one's own potential for evil is.

Besides, no surgeon ever healed without a cut. But just avoid that one who enjoys the cutting more than the cure.