

Homily of Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C

This is the last Sunday before Lent. The first and second readings have words of encouragement for us. The first reading says, "As the test of what the potter molds is in the furnace, so in tribulation is the test of the just." Those who hold onto God, blessings come after tribulations. Jesus says, "Blessed is the one who does not lose faith in me" (Luke 7:21). In the second reading St Paul says, "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."

In the Gospel Jesus tells us, "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 perceive the wooden beam in your own eye?'" By this statement, Jesus invites us to pay more attention to our own faults than to the faults of others. This statement of Jesus means that the greater problem lies within the person than outside the person. We should rather become our own accuser (Proverb 18:17), rather than accuser of our brothers and sisters (Revelation 12:10). When we point one accusing finger to another person, the other fingers point at us and accuse us.

When we are blind to our faults, weaknesses and sins, we are quick to notice other people's faults, weaknesses and sins. The more we know our faults, weaknesses and sins, the less we see other people's faults, weaknesses and sins. That is why the ancient Greeks believed that self-knowledge is the best knowledge. Thus, the maxim, "Know thyself."

It is sinful for us to ignore our own faults while emphasizing the faults of other people. This sin is only a manifestation of some internal deficiencies. Self-knowledge heals such deficiencies. Self-knowledge helps us not to jump into condemning rashly and judging prematurely, but to have the understanding that "there but for the grace of God, go I."

Jesus concludes the Gospel of today with the words, "A good person out of the store of goodness in his heart produces good, but an evil person out of store of evil produces evil; from the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks." The first reading says, "One's speech disclose the bent of one's mind." From these statements we can conclude that the state of our heart determines the state of our relationship with God and with human beings. Whatever is in the heart either sanctifies or defiles the body. Whatever occupies the depth of a person's heart is what the person projects outside of himself or herself. It is what we have that we give. When a person's heart is hardened, the person's conscience dies, and the person's spiritual eye goes completely blind. Then, the person lives an unspiritual life, and does things as if there is no God (Psalm 14:1).

Therefore, let us fill our hearts with whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, and whatever admirable, excellent and praiseworthy (Philippians 4:8). We are invited today to remove our attention from the exterior so that we can make the inward journey of self-examination and acquire self-knowledge. We are invited to pray for a renewed heart and a heart of flesh to replace our heart of stone (Ezekiel 36:26) as we go into the Lenten Season. Lucien Diess' hymn, *Grant to us O Lord a Heart Renewed* comes to mind:

*Grant to us, O Lord, a heart renewed;
Recreate in us your own Spirit, Lord!
Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord our God,
When I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel.
Deep within their being I will implant my law;
I will write it in their hearts.
I will be their God, and they shall be my people.
And for all their faults I will grant forgiveness;
Nevermore will I remember their sins.*

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