

March 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> -- 8<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year C

“A Good Tree Bears Good Fruit!”

Today's first reading comes from the Old Testament book of Sirach, a book written about 200 years before Christ.

The Book of Sirach contains a tremendous wealth of the wisdom of those times in the Jewish world and culture.

The Book of Sirach often uses real down-to-earth wording to help us all grasp the truth it wishes to convey.

How about the beginning of the reading?

“When a sieve is shaken, the husks appear.”

Any bread-baker back then or today would nod in agreement.

*[show a flour sift]*

A bread-baker would put flour into the sift and shake it slowly to find any foreign substances in the flour ... like a husk of the grains used to make the flour or maybe something that had accidentally fallen into the flour.

We sure don't want any of that stuff in OUR bread!

Sirach tells us that the **words** that **we** use similarly can expose to others what's morally wrong inside of us ... our hatefulness, our anger, our jealousy, our selfishness, our injustice, ...

Sirach then uses another analogy, a potter, a person who makes objects out of clay by forming their shape and then baking it in a furnace.

*[show a chalice made out of clay]*

A rank amateur forming the clay will probably not do it just right and then baking it in a furnace, maybe not at the right temperature, will probably end up with a cracked item that is not really the desired shape either!

Sirach tells us that we can also have problems like that clay in the furnace, problems in life like stress, oppression, unemployment, disease, tribulations.

So, who is it that is forming the clay we are?

Do we let today's world form us so we end up a mess

Or ...

Do we let the Lord be the one who forms us, who leads our thinking and our actions, the Lord, who can help us through the furnace of tough times in life?

Sirach also tells us about trees and the fruit they bear.

Of course, we want to see and eat their good fruit.

*[Show a real orange]*

But if the tree is diseased, a tree with leaves covered with bugs, a tree where the bugs have eaten away at the bark.

Will it bear good fruit? Of course, NO WAY!

Our speech and our actions are our fruit.

They let people see what we are really like at inside, what kind of tree we are.

Do we care? Are we committed to our work? Do we respect others?

In our second reading from St. Paul to the Corinthians one line really caught my attention: "***Where, O death, is your sting?***"

With recent deaths of several friends, like Ron Marine and Irene Unsleber, it made me think.

Fortunately I recalled an experience from 12 years ago when I was in the hospital because of a heart attack.

As they wheeled me down the hall I started humming a children's song: "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus in the morning, Jesus in the noontime, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus when the sun goes down!"

OMG ... the sun could be going down for me!

I could be dying! .....

BUT, that could mean that I am going to heaven to see God, God the Father ... and Jesus ... and the saints ... and Mom and Dad ... and my sister Jane.

Yes, death, you can take your sting and take a hike!

Luke's Gospel today has many examples from Jesus that are similar to the wisdom we heard in the Sirach reading.

One statement from Jesus sounds so similar:

"A good tree does not bear rotten fruit,  
nor does a rotten tree bear good fruit."

All these readings today seem to share a quality, a quality that says "Look into ourselves and give some thought to what kind of people are we."

That's a really good exercise for us right at this time since we are about to start the Lenten season this very Wednesday.

For instance, have we used the Lenten season to become:

- a **better** tree providing better fruit?
- a piece of clay being formed by God the **better** potter?
- some flour being sifted to remove unwanted behaviors?

Yes, Lent is an opportunity for us all to become **better**.

We probably remember the three words associated with Lent:

- prayer
- fasting
- almsgiving.

I smile at some past attempts to live those out.

This year I am going to try something a little different.

From my physical work-outs at the gym I know that the word  
"gradually" makes great sense.

Start simply.

Push yourself.

Get better and better all the time.

So, here's an idea for our Lenten efforts.

If we want to grow in our prayer practices, we can start by saying, "OK,  
I am going to pray every day before 9:00am!"

So, pick a prayer, or pick a group of prayers, or pick a decade of the  
rosary.

Try that exercise for the first week of Lent.

Then "gradually getting better", we could say in week two, "OK, I am  
going to pray every day before 9:00am *and* again before noon."

Of course, that then leads to 9am, noon *and* 3 pm in week three.

Sound like the gym exercise? Pushing ourselves? Getting better all  
the time?

And how about those prayers?

Would they, by any chance, help us to get closer to the Lord, to meet  
the Lord, to encounter the Lord?

I bet they would!

And, what if you choose to *give up something* during Lent?

Same idea! Do it gradually.

No sweets before 9am.

No sweets before noon (week 2)

No sweets before 3 pm (week 3) ... no sweets at all by end of Lent!

***Blessings on every day of your Lenten exercises!***