

8th Sunday of the Year

Year C – (Series 2)

Praise And Thanksgiving.

Today let our hearts be so filled with the joy of the risen Christ that we can praise and thank him with sincerity and truth.

(Readings: Ecclesiasticus 27: 4-7. 1 Corinthians 15: 54-58. Luke 6: 39-45.)

When I looked at today's Gospel reading, I couldn't help but think of George Méliès 1902 film, 'Trip to the moon', with that enormous rocket imbedded in the moon's right eye. And I wondered what Walt Disney might have done with Jesus' image of a man with a plank in his eye, trying to extract a splinter from his brother's. One thing you can be sure of is that it would have been a cartoonist's field day.

You, too, may find yourselves smiling at the thought of all the possible images, and who could blame you. But, having said that, Jesus' intention was quite serious. He wanted us to recognise how hypocritical we can be, and how we so easily see the faults in other people, but not see them in ourselves.

If only we would take the plank out of our own eye, then we would be able to see more clearly, clearly enough to take the splinter from our brother's eye. In other words, we must begin by reforming ourselves.

It's easy to see the way in which other people need to change. Has there ever been a husband among us who has not tried to reform his wife, or any wife who does not still wish to reform her husband? Are there any parents here who are not trying to reform their children, or any older children who would not like to reform their parents? And again, has there ever been a parish priest who did not wish he could reform at least one or two of his parishioners, or, those one or two parishioners, who would not like to reform their priest?

We all know, only too well, that this world in which we live is far from the created perfection God intended, but reformation, like charity, begins at home. And so, if we want a better world, the place to start, said Jesus, is with ourselves. Yet, that is something we are loath to do. We much prefer correcting the faults and failures of others around us.

So why is it that we are more inclined to reform others than ourselves? Well, I think it is because we find it very difficult to see ourselves as we really are. Most of us tend to judge our own behaviour far more leniently than that of other people.

When someone, say, loses their temper, we call that person a spoiled brat, and say that they should grow up. But when we lose our temper, we explain it away, saying that we are tired, or that we have a headache, or we're just not ourselves, and people ought to show a little more understanding of our difficult circumstance. When others expect to have things their way, we say they are selfish and uncaring. When we want things our way, we are only protecting our rights and preventing people from taking advantage of us.

Whereas others have obvious glaring faults, we ourselves have minor, even comely idiosyncrasies, that are of no real consequence. Sometimes our faults even appear to us as virtues. For example, we think we are brave, when we are really being stubborn. We say we are being helpful when we are actually an interfering nuisance. We think of ourselves as easy-going, which is often an excuse for laziness. We fail to see how annoying our behaviour is to other people.

Jesus hit the nail right on the head: we have blind spots which prevent us from seeing the planks in our own eyes. The question we must ask ourselves is, 'What can we do about this tendency?' Well, for a start we could occasionally listen to the well-intended criticism of our friends and loved ones.

Chances are, though, if it's uninvited criticism, we tend not to like it. We are offended by it, and we immediately become defensive, or worse still, aggressive. After all, other people's opinions are not necessarily more accurate than our own. But if it is true, if we can sometimes see each other's faults more clearly, then perhaps we could benefit from a friend's advice, when it is given lovingly, constructively, and fairly.

It occurs to me that if there is something objectionable in us, something of which we are unaware, the sooner we know about it the better. At least then, we will have a chance to do a bit of self-improving. But here's the crux of the question, *is* it possible for us to make any real changes in *our* lives?

We have all heard of the saying, "You cannot teach an old dog new tricks." Well, that is just not true. In my past life I had some contact with the Drug Squad (at a purely professional level of course) and they were trying to recruit sniffer dogs.

They were particularly interested in older dogs. One of the dogs they chose was seven years old. They explained to the owner that it had the necessary liveliness and retrieving skills, and so it could easily be taught to detect drugs. So, you can teach old dogs new tricks! And if this applies to dogs, it must surely be true of humans.

There are many examples of dramatic changes among the saints. For example, St Margaret of Cortona, who was in an illicit relationship, and saw nothing wrong in her way of life. One day she found that the man she loved had been murdered. This forced her to face the truth and admit to herself that she had been selfish and immoral. She was then able to change her life, and she devoted herself to a life of penance and care of the poor.

So, people can change, if they really want to. There are many success stories of former drug addicts or alcoholics who have overcome their addictions, hardened criminals who have turned their lives around and become useful citizens, so many bad people who became good.

None of this is magic, but it can only happen when we see our failings and truly want to change. Perhaps today we could pray, like the blind man, earlier in the Gospel, "Lord, that I may see."

Whatever is impairing our view of ourselves, let us ask God to help us to remove it. With determination, and the help of other people, and most of all, the grace of God, we can take that first step towards reforming ourselves.