

Brothers and sisters, the theme running through the readings is that: **by their fruit you will know them** or it is easy to find fault in others than to identify our own faults. In order to distinguish a good tree from a bad tree, we need to look at the fruit a tree produces (good deeds) and not at its foliage (words). According to St. Bede, a person who has a treasure of patience and of perfect charity in his heart yields excellent fruit; he loves his neighbor and has all the other qualities Jesus teaches. Ben Sirach in the first reading, also teaches all who want to attain knowledge to live in accordance with the law; by using the analogy of the fruit of a tree shows the care the tree has had. As an example, the sycamore fruit had to be punctured to grow fat and juicy; so too does a man's speech disclose the bent of his mind. Praise no man before he speaks, for it is then that men are tested. Speech is the principal criterion for evaluating a person.

Sirach says that people's faults appear when they speak, especially when they speak and aren't considering their words. We often hide behind masks, but conversation reveals our inner thoughts no matter how careful we are to dissemble. Speech is a means of testing the inner character of a person, because what comes in speech betrays what's in our heart. The climax of the reading is the last line (Ecc.27: 7), saying that what a person says is clearly the test of that person. Sirach's teaching is very relevant for human integrity in today's world of public relations and image-making, the soundbite and the slogan.

Today's Gospel begins; "Can a blind person guide a blind person? Will not both fall into a pit? (Lk.6:39) In Matthew, these words are addressed to "scribes and Pharisees" (Matthew 15:14), but Luke addresses not false teachers but the disciples; who are blind until they have their eyes opened by Jesus' teaching (the sermon on the plain, which we have heard for the past two weeks). Once they have learned to apply the teaching, they will be able to teach others. No disciple is superior to the teacher; but when fully trained, every disciple will be like his teacher. 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 even notice the wooden beam in your own eye? Disciples are called to exercise self-criticism. Remove the wooden beam from their own eyes first; then they will see clearly to remove the splinter in their brother's eye.

Jesus continues his admonishing to the disciples; "a good tree does not bear rotten fruit, nor does a rotten tree bear good fruit. Here, Luke gives a much more universal application. To distinguish the good tree from the bad tree we need to look at the fruit the tree produces (good deeds) and not at its foliage (words). Jesus' meaning is that internal dispositions reveal themselves in external actions. People show their true condition best when they're being themselves. If a person's speech is profane or crude, we have a right to conclude that there's something wrong with the person inside. For every tree is known by its own fruit. For people do not pick figs from thorn bushes, nor do they gather grapes from brambles. A good person out of the store of goodness in his heart produces good, but an evil person out of a store of evil produces evil; for from the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks. Effective compliance with the teaching of the sermon on the plain can come only from a heart that has been converted to the gracious God proclaimed in Jesus' Kingdom ministry (read James3:1-18).

For the past two weeks, we have heard Saint Paul talk of the reality of the resurrection for all of us, as demonstrated by Jesus. Today, we hear Paul end his discussion of the resurrection of the dead with a hymn of triumph over death. Paul's instruction on the resurrection – more specifically (1Cor.15:35), that believers shares in the bodily resurrection with Christ. In the section just preceding, Paul has described death as the 'last enemy', the one outstanding force not yet totally subject to the power of the risen Lord. Though death continues, Paul, in a vivid image, asserts that Christ has drawn its 'sting'. That is, that he has overcome that which, like the sting of a poisonous spider, gave physical death power to be *eternal* death: namely, sin. Believers may still die physically, but the gift of the Spirit, as a consequence of the resurrection of Jesus, will enable them to live the righteous lives that will ensure their own resurrection.

Finally, dear friends, let us do our uppermost best by doing good work at all times, knowing that God will not make our laboring in vain'. Though so often we seem to be getting nowhere and are tempted to give up, let us continue hoping; let us continue living virtuous life; let us continue bearing good fruits and God will bless us. Amen!