

Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time C/2019

The readings of this Sunday talk about honesty. They show that honesty is one of the most important qualities in human relationships. They invite us to the practice of honesty and sincerity in our relationships with one another.

The first reading describes human language as revelatory of the thoughts hidden in the heart of someone. It compares the veracity of a man to a tree that can be recognized by its fruits.

What it is behind this text is the idea that what someone says reveals the abundance of his heart. There is also the idea that the result of speech without honesty is hypocrisy.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel. The Gospel starts with Jesus telling his disciples that a blind man cannot guide another lest they all fall into a pit. Then, it reproduces Jesus' denunciation of those who are keen in correcting others without first correcting themselves. The Gospel ends up with Jesus' claim that a bad tree cannot give good fruits.

What do we learn from today's Gospel? Today, I want to talk about honesty. Let me start with a very simple observation. Human language plays a big role in our relationship with one another. Because, it has a role to play, it is susceptible of revealing who the person we are dealing with is; whether he is trustworthy or not; whether he is reliable or not, etc.

By just talking with a person, without even examining the body language, we can determine his culture, his country, his temperament, his profession, his moral values, etc. However, not all language is honest and reflects the real person. It happens very often that people hide the truth of who they are or of what they think by offering a false image of agreement or of themselves. We know that to be true when people use the language of diplomacy or flattery that does not reflect the truth which is in their hearts.

It is that danger of double language that Jesus is denouncing in today's Gospel. For Jesus, only honesty with one another can help us build true communication and right relationships with one another. Anytime there is not a unified language that expresses the truth which is in the heart, what is done is hypocrisy.

If that is the case, then, there is a question: what can we do in order to avoid hypocrisy? How can we become honest in our dealings with one another? Jesus proposes a threefold way that can help us achieve such an objective.

The first way is the conversion of heart. Conversion means a change. It can be a change of heart, mentality or behaviors. It means the pursuit of the truth, a U-turn so that we find the right direction that can help us live truthfully and honestly.

Jesus formulates this way through the example of a blind person guiding another who is blind. In fact, a blind is a sick person who, because of the absence of sight, cannot see where he is going. Even if it is true that by losing the sight, a person can develop other senses, it is, however, true that it is impossible for a blind person to guide another who is blind. Otherwise the ending of the story will be catastrophic. If a blind man fakes to be healthy by pretending to be seeing, he puts his life and that of others in danger.

In other words, we have to change if we want to become an honest and reliable person. Without conversion, we will never be good disciples of Jesus. We need to recognize our shortcomings, look for improvement and healing; otherwise we will be a danger to ourselves and for others.

The second way is self-criticism. Self criticism means an inner dialogue with ourselves in order to find the strengths and the weaknesses within us. It means the ability of evaluating ourselves by looking within us so that we come to see our faults and our qualities. Lastly, self-criticism is the capacity of judging oneself before judging others.

In that sense, self-criticism is a pre-condition for self-improvement and growth. It is only when we courageously look inside ourselves and identify our mistakes that we can begin the journey of correcting or at least minimizing them in order to become a better person.

When people criticize others without a self-criticism, they end up in hypocrisy. When they set high standards for others and fail to do the same with themselves, it becomes hypocrisy. That is what Jesus is saying, “Why do you notice the splinter in the eyes of your brother’s eye, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own eye”?

Moreover, our criticism of others might be true, but when it is done without judging ourselves, it becomes self-righteousness and self-justification. Self-righteousness and self-justification, in turn, lead to the mechanism of scapegoat where we project our faults on others because we want to ignore our responsibilities.

When Jesus is inviting us to look first at the splinter in our eyes, it does not mean that we cannot criticize others, what he wants is that we come to the awareness of our scars and darkness of ours. Instead of focusing only on others we have to look, first, at ourselves and see what we have to change in order to be honest, sincere and truthful. One thing is honesty and constructive criticism; another is a flat and destructive criticism.

The third way is transparency. Transparency means a lack of hidden agendas and unveiled motivations. It means also, speaking the truth of the heart. As a good tree is recognized by its fruits, so is a man recognized by his deeds. As good comes from good, evil comes from evil.

In order for our words and our deeds to be good, they must come from a heart that is pure and good. A man’s words flow out of what fills his heart. Which leads to the question, what fills our heart? What kind of heart is behind the way we criticize others?

The way we offer criticism depends on our heart condition. If goodness is absent from our heart, there is a problem. When what we say comes from a genuine attempt to help others, people will listen to us. But, if they doubt, they will not listen to us. It is impossible to do the deeds of God unless we possess the heart of God.

Sirach 27: 4-7; 1 Corinthians 15: 54-58; Luke 6: 39-45



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