

EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (YEAR C)

March 3, 2019

Sirach 27:4–7 • 1 Corinthians 15:54–58 • Luke 6:39–45

I.

I was in my first or second year of the seminary and I was at home; it might have been Thanksgiving.

Anyway, I was joking around about something, engaged in some kind of tomfoolery, and my mom, exasperated, said to me:

“You know,
I can’t believe you’re going to be a future member of the clergy.”

Without missing a beat, I replied:
“Mom, don’t judge me.”

And my mom just started laughing—
there was nothing else she could say!

II.

Now, my zinger was rhetorically effective, and funny, but it was terrible moral theology.

The sin of passing judgment means attributing motives, which can’t be known, to a person.

That’s very different from pointing out someone’s bad behavior.

I mention this because, nowadays, as soon as a person criticizes another’s behavior, he or she is accused of judgment.

Who knew that I was anticipating a major social trend back in 2001?

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that a person is guilty of “rash judgment” if he or she “even tacitly, assumes as true, without sufficient foundation, the moral fault of a neighbor” (no. 2477).

The *Catechism* then provides a helpful tip:

“To avoid rash judgment, everyone should be careful to interpret insofar as possible his neighbor's thoughts, words, and deeds in a favorable way” (no. 2478).

In today's Gospel, which is a continuation of the Sermon on the Plain, Jesus tells us that we are responsible for guiding others to the truth.

This requires that we first be aware of our own imperfections; but it does not mean that we should be afraid to speak the truth:

“Remove the wooden beam from your own eye first; then you will see clearly to remove the splinter in your brother's eye.”

So often today we are hesitant to do so for fear that we will be accused of judging another person.

Or, we are afraid of the charge of hypocrisy.

Just as pointing out bad behavior is not the same as judgment, so imperfection is not the same as hypocrisy.

A hypocrite is someone who puts on a false appearance of religion, who denies his or her own imperfections:

“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?”

Each Christian, by virtue of Baptism, is an evangelist.

“Evangelist” means one who spreads the good news of Jesus’ Death and Resurrection, for the forgiveness of sins, by word and example.

Christ declares in the Gospel:

“No disciple is superior to the teacher;
but when fully trained,
the disciple will be like his teacher.”

Christians are disciples of Christ;
we become like our teacher,
without ever replacing or eclipsing him.

Today a parishioner will receive the Sacrament of Confirmation.

Confirmation is the sacrament of the Church’s mission;
that is, of Christian testimony:
bearing witness to Jesus Christ in the world.

Confirmation is a renewal of Pentecost.

The sacrament bestows a special power of the Holy Spirit
to empower a person live out the Christian faith.

It’s called “Confirmation” because it “confirms” or strengthens
the grace of Baptism.

This does not mean that Baptism is not effective by itself.

Rather, Confirmation rather it orients and supplements Baptism in regard to mission.

Notice that Confirmation has nothing to do with being an adult in the Church.

Promise me that you will never—ever!—say that in Confirmation, a person makes a one-time, definitive commitment to the Catholic Church, because the confirmand's parents did so at Baptism.

No! The Christian faith is lived out each day by a person's witness.

Christian witness begins with giving a good example, even though each of us is quite imperfect.

Imperfection should not lead to paralysis in regard to evangelization; it should be cause for humility and dependence on God.

Jesus says in the Gospel:

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

God wants us to bear fruit:

to lead lives of holiness and joy so that Christ is made known.

Christ is not only a teacher.

His Death and Resurrection,
which the Holy Spirit renews in the sacraments,
is a power at work in our lives.

That inspiration and strength is our witness.

