

Homily for Sunday, Feb. 27, 2022 – Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time



We are all familiar with Jesus' expression about taking the log out of your own eye before you proceed with trying to take the speck out of your neighbour's eye. We all know exactly what that means. But it is one of those sayings of Jesus that we would rather apply to others than to ourselves.

At least that's the way I would like to see it applied. I would rather attempt to straighten out everyone else before considering what needs to be straightened out in my own life.

But here's the rub. The spiritual journey always begins with going inside first, and correcting what's inside, before moving outside. Trust me, if there was another way, an easier way, I would have told you. The spiritual journey begins with looking in the mirror before turning the mirror on others. Going inside and taking a look at who we really are and how our words, actions, and attitudes affect people takes a lot of honesty not to mention a whole bunch of courage. In fact, I'm going to say it's the hardest thing you are ever going to do in your life. And maybe that's why so few of us fully embrace the spiritual journey. We just know, at some point, we will have to come face to face with our own shadow, our own faults, our own flaws, our own imperfections, and that is not a happy prospect for any of us. If we don't admit we have a shadow and deal with it every day, we end up projecting our darkness onto someone else...those evil Ukrainians, those immigrants taking our jobs, those alcoholics, those homosexuals, those Liberals, those Conservatives, and the list goes on. While Jesus spoke plainly about specks and logs in peoples' eyes, we might say it this way: You can lead another only as far as you have been willing to go yourself. Isn't that true? Or, we might say: You do not have the luxury of changing others until and unless you change yourself.

John Shea, a theologian from Chicago, and the best storyteller I've ever heard, shared this story with us in Ottawa back in 1993, and for some reason I remembered it. As a priest he was invited by McDonald's--the world's largest fast-food chain--to address their corporate executives. At first he thought, "Geez, I'm

way out of my league, and I'm going to have to work long and hard to figure out what they are talking about."

But after a short while, this priest was perfectly at home because, as he says, "the business world has borrowed and mimicked church ministry language with words like empowerment, retreats, and transformation, to name a few." The mucky mucks at McDonald's called him in for one reason—they wanted to empower their employees. So, they asked him, "From your perspective, what has to happen?" He said, "They had all kinds of statistics and *outer* analysis." They were, in John Shea's opinion (although he didn't say it to their faces) in the classic idolatrous position. The classic idolatrous position is: I'm free and everyone else is a mechanism. In other words, I'm free but everyone else needs to be manipulated and shaped up if they are going to fit into my world, which is the only worthwhile world to live in. So, this humble priest says, "You want to empower your employees to be more productive? Fine. What has to happen in you so that empowerment can happen in them?"

"No, Father, with all due respect, you don't understand, we want them to be empowered."

"No, no, no, no; this is not going to work," he told them, and it was probably the first time these executives ever heard it, "That they did not have the luxury of analyzing and changing anyone else without any movement inside themselves." That is the spiritual path and it applies in every situation that you want to change or improve. The spiritual path always begins with, "What has to happen in me?" Darn it! And, that's probably why the spiritual path is rarely embraced wholeheartedly: it is so slow. If there is to be any movement to improve things out there, it always (100% of the time) begins with a movement inside yourself. You are always an obstacle, and so am I. This is the path. You are always part of the problem. Always. The imperial ego, which is alive and well in every one of us, does not want to hear this. The ego never wants to admit, "There is a log in my eye" or that I am, at least, 5% responsible for the problem in front of me. It always wants to bypass that step so it can get on with pointing out the perceived problem of the speck in another's eye.

To put it in our own context, I'm often asked, "Why don't we have more young people at church?" Personally, I would love to have more young people at Sunday

Mass, and I don't know of a priest or a minister that doesn't want the same. But it begs a starter question: "What change has to happen in us so that positive change can happen in them (the young people)?" We do not have the luxury of changing them without changing something within ourselves. Everyone of us is both part of the solution and part of the problem, including myself. If we think we are only part of the solution and never part of the problem, we are only fooling ourselves. We are living a lie. Or, as Jesus says in today's gospel, ***"You hypocrites, first take the log out of your own eye and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbour's eye."***

Consider this. Tradition has it that one of the names we give to Satan (besides the Devil, the Evil One, the Father of Lies or the Deceiver) is Lucifer. You've all heard the name Lucifer. Lucifer is not a pet name for your mother-in-law. Lucifer in Hebrew means "Angel of Light." How bizarre is that? Shouldn't he be called the Angel of Darkness? No. Lucifer is well-named as the angel of light. When you think you are all light, and you don't have a shadow side, you are living a lie. It is at that point that your perception is blocked much like someone who has a log in their eye. The Pharisees, the only group that Jesus had trouble with, were such people. They were know-it-alls. We have all encountered people like that. You can't challenge them; they have an answer to everything you say. They are more Catholic than the pope. They believe they are 100% right and, thus, believe others, who disagree with them, are 100% wrong. In other words, they think they are all light, like Lucifer, the angel of light. When you're all light, you never admit to darkness. You never admit you have a shadow.

But for Jesus, it doesn't have to be that way. We don't have to live from our egos. The ego is so fragile and needy. We can live from our True Selves. If you know who you are in God, if you are in touch with your True Self, you give up the game of always looking good and never admitting fault. That game is all smoke and mirrors anyways. The True Self knows deep down that it is the good tree and so it produces good fruit. It doesn't have to pretend to be something or someone it is not.

Some people equate the True Self with the heart itself. When the heart speaks, it's the True Self speaking. Jesus has a little saying about this when he says, ***"The words of the mouth are the overflow of the heart"*** (Mt. 12:34). When we allow the heart to speak, words of love, understanding, and gratitude usually flow from our

mouths. When hateful words flow out of our mouths, it's not the True Self speaking; it's the ego trying to puff itself up.

While Jesus loved everyone, I believe his least favorite people were the religious phonies, the Pharisees, the hypocrites. His favorite people were the humble ones. The humble ones just know that they didn't know it all.

On Wednesday, we start the Season of Lent. Let's pray we cultivate humble hearts. For the words of the mouth are, indeed, the overflow of the heart.

Fr. Phil