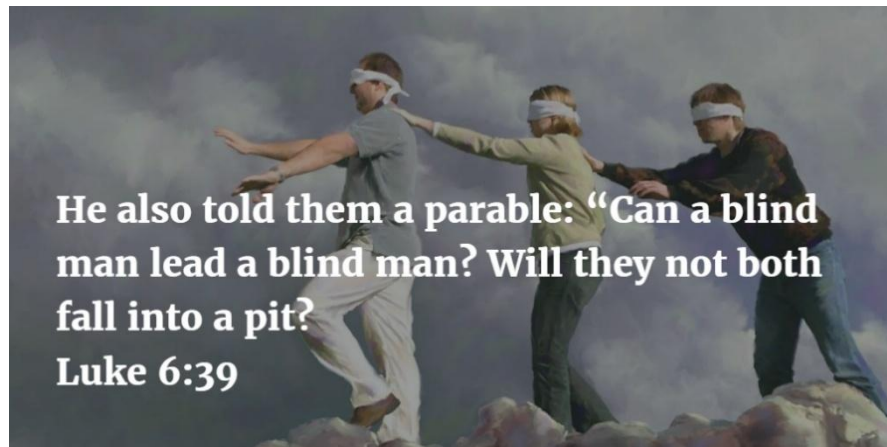


Homily – March 2nd, 2025 – 8th Sunday in Ordinary Time



**He also told them a parable: “Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit?”
Luke 6:39**

When Jesus commanded us, in last Sunday’s gospel, to “love our enemies,” it was probably the most challenging thing he could have

said. Most days, loving my enemy takes more courage than I think I have. Today, in the gospel, he commands us to take the “log out of our own eye” before we even attempt to take the sliver out of our neighbour’s eye. Again, most days, removing the log from my own eye takes more honesty than I think I have. On a good day, I pray for the gifts of courage and honesty. On a bad day, I have no problem ditching courage and honesty in favor of a bag of chips and a chocolate bar.

When the great Swiss psychologist Carl Jung spoke about the log in our eye, he used a different term than Jesus did, although they were both speaking about the same reality. Carl Jung called the log the “shadow.” The shadow, and we all have one, is the part of us we desperately try to hide. It’s not flattering to speak about it, because it makes us feel so humble. The shadow in me is my shortcomings, my faults, my flaws, my prejudices, my embarrassments, my sin—and who wants to talk about that? Jung never thought we could clean up, paint up, or fix up the shadow.

Our shadow, even though we don't like to acknowledge it may, in fact, be our saving grace. At the Easter Vigil each year we sing about this "happy fault." Happy fault? That sounds like a contradiction. How can a fault be something that we're happy about? I know it's referring to Adam's fault, his sin, that was overcome by God's grace. But I also think "happy fault" is referring to our shadow. Thank goodness we have a shadow.

In other words, the shadow isn't as bad as it seems. In fact, the worst thing we could do is to deny we have a shadow. The only group of people that Jesus could not make any headway with were the Pharisees, because they denied they had a shadow, a log in their eye. For them, the problem was always with someone else's eye, someone else's behavior, someone else's sinful lifestyle but never theirs. Jesus often called them hypocrites. The term hypocrite means an "actor," a "stage player." Hypocrites, like stage actors, project an image on the outside that is nothing like they are on the inside. Hypocrites want you to believe the mask and not what's behind the mask.

So, the shadow in us has a redeeming quality. It keeps us humble; it keeps us real. Without the shadow, we would be hypocrites all the time living in a world of our own making and always blaming someone else for our own shortcomings. Fr. Richard Rohr says that each morning the first thing we should do is nod to our shadow. Acknowledge it. Befriend it. Recognize it is part of you and will travel with you until the day you die. It's there to humble you, not humiliate you.

I don't know if you've ever had the opportunity to visit any of the great cathedrals in Europe or the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa. What you will find on the façades of these Gothic-style buildings are gargoyles, those grotesque creatures perched up high. They are there to remind parishioners going into church and politicians going into parliament to not get too full of themselves. The gargoyle is there to remind us that we all carry a shadow.

We are all a mixture of light and darkness. Some "super" Catholics think that if they can just focus on the light, focus on saying the right prayers at the right time, go to church every day, go to confession weekly, that this will ward off the shadow, and it will simply disappear because of their tenacious efforts at being so good. That's the best recipe, in my mind, if you want to become a Pharisee. The shadow isn't evil. It's there to ground you in the real.

In his book Hope Against Darkness, Fr. Richard Rohr writes, ***"Spiritual transformation is often thought of as a movement from darkness to light. In one sense that is true, but in another sense, it is totally false. We forget that darkness is always present alongside the light. Pure light blinds, only the mixture of darkness and light allows us to see. Shadows are required for our seeing. God alone lives in perfect light"*** (James 1:17).

It might come as a shock to many people, but the name Lucifer (the name we traditionally give to the devil) means "angel of light." You would think it should mean "angel of darkness", but it doesn't. When we think there is no darkness in us, when we think we are so perfect, when we think we are only light, we are

actually—in that moment—more aligned with the Pharisees and Lucifer than we are with Jesus.

When we don't accept that there is a shadow in us, we tend to project all our darkness on to someone else, and it really doesn't matter who that someone else is. Besides the log in the eye parable, Jesus has another clever way of speaking about how we project—rather than embrace—our shadow onto others. Two men go up to the Temple to pray, a Pharisee and a tax collector. The Pharisee, supposing himself to be all light, all good, prayed this way: "I thank you, God, that I'm not like other people, crooks, adulterers, or heaven forbid like that tax collector over there. I fast twice a week and I give 1/10 of my income to the Temple." Notice how he denies having a shadow and how much he must project onto another. The tax collector, without lifting his head, prays honestly, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner" (Lk. 18:9-14). No projection, only a child of God embracing his own shadow.

Encountering our shadow initially feels so humbling; in fact, it feels like death. It's where we need to be, but we are never left there permanently. Jesus needed to be in the tomb, but he wasn't left there permanently. Like Jesus, and like the Phoenix, we will rise from the ashes.

Jesus never told us not to take the sliver out of another person's eye; he only told to start with our own eyes. If we are to be a mentor, in the Christian life, for others, we must start by first being an apprentice. If we are to be a teacher for another, we must start by being a student. Today's disciple is tomorrow's teacher.

A good teacher is always someone who has eaten some ashes in their lifetime, allowed themselves to be humbled. They just know that they don't know it all, and that's what makes them such good mentors.

Jesus says in today's gospel, "***A disciple is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully qualified will be like their teacher.***" Who is the Teacher of all teachers? Jesus, the one who was so in touch with his shadow that he would stoop to wash our feet and give us his life.

~Fr. Phil