

GOSPEL

LUKE 6:39-45

Jesus told a parable to his disciples, 'Can one blind man guide another? Surely both will fall into a pit? The disciple is not superior to his teacher; the fully trained disciple will always be like his teacher. Why do you observe the splinter in your brother's eye and never notice the plank in your own? How can you say to your brother, "Brother, let me take out the splinter that is in your eye," when you cannot see the plank in your own? Hypocrite! Take the plank out of your own eye first, and then you will see clearly enough to take out the splinter that is in your brother's eye.

'There is no sound tree that produces rotten fruit, nor again a rotten tree that produces sound fruit. For every tree can be told by its own fruit: people do not pick figs from thorns, nor gather grapes from brambles. A good man draws what is good from the store of goodness in his heart; a bad man draws what is bad from the store of badness. For a man's words flow out of what fills his heart.'

The Gospel of the Lord.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. In what ways do you open yourself to Jesus, so that you can be more like him?
2. What are some 'planks' or 'splinters' in your own eye that you need to remove with God's help?
3. What good things do you desire God to place in your heart which you can 'draw on' so as to be a better disciple?

A REFLECTION BY FR BRENDAN BYRNE SJ

Sourced from 'The Hospitality of God: A Reading of Luke's Gospel' by Fr Brendan Byrne SJ

The commands not to judge and not to condemn raise the issue of just how difficult it is for people to have the kind of understanding of others that would really allow them to make judgments. Jesus illustrates the matter with the images of one blind person leading another and with the (again outlandish and humorous) notion of attempting to remove the speck in a neighbour's eye when one has a log in one's own eye.

The point being made is that relations between human beings based on retribution, or even on strict justice, fail to take account of the extreme difficulty of really knowing what is going on inside another person. If God, who does see the heart, acts with such generosity, understanding, and compassion, that surely should be the model for human interactions – certainly within the community of the kingdom, but even in the response of members of the community to outsiders who persecute and maltreat them.

The sermon concludes with reflection of a more general nature. These seem to take off from the accusation, 'hypocrite', launched at the person who wants to remove a speck from a neighbour's eye. The image of a tree and its yield of fruit illustrates the continuity that must prevail between heart (the ultimate seat of human quality) and external action. The continuity must flow in the other direction too. Good intentions are no use if not put into practice.

The extended image drawn from contrasting modes of building a house rounds off the sermon in the same vein. To take to heart and put into practice ideals such as loving one's enemies, is to make oneself vulnerable before the wider world. But those who do so are building the 'house' of their existence upon a foundation of rock. Those who hear but fail to act build, by contrast without foundation

and expose themselves to ruin. The paradox makes sense in the light of the expectation central in the sermon and implicit in this image that concludes it: in intervention of God is coming, which will be like floods that rise and beat against a house. In the light of that intervention it makes sense to heed the words of Jesus and adopt the vulnerable life he comments. To do so is to build upon the rock of divine power and faithfulness.

REFLECTION QUESTION

- What has struck you from this reflection by Fr Brendan?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God
4. Prayer for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.