

EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Sirach = SEER-ak or SĪ-ruhk
sieve = sĭv

Because the reading is image-heavy, focus on the nouns in the first three sentences.

tribulation = trih-byoo-LAY-shuhn

Shift your emphasis to the verbs in this final sentence. Conclude firmly with the word "tested," which is the theme of this reading.

For meditation and context:

LECTIONARY #84

READING I Sirach 27:4-7

A reading from the Book of Sirach

When a sieve is shaken, the husks appear;
so do one's faults when one speaks.
As the test of what the potter molds is in the furnace,
so in tribulation is the test of the just.
The fruit of a tree shows the care it has had;
so too does one's speech disclose the bent of one's mind.
Praise no one before he speaks,
for it is then that people are tested.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 92:2-3, 13-14, 15-16 (see 2a)

R. Lord, it is good to give thanks to you.

It is good to give thanks to the LORD,
to sing praise to your name, Most High,
to proclaim your kindness at dawn
and your faithfulness throughout
the night.

They shall bear fruit even in old age;
vigorous and sturdy shall they be,
declaring how just is the LORD,
my rock, in whom there is no wrong.

The just one shall flourish like the palm tree,
like a cedar of Lebanon shall he grow.
They that are planted in the house of
the LORD
shall flourish in the courts of our God.

READING I

The Wisdom of Ben Sira (also called Ecclesiasticus or Sirach) was composed in Jerusalem around 180 BC by Jesus, ben Eleazar, ben Sirach, and later translated into Greek in Egypt around 117 BC by his grandson. This deuterocanonical work is part of the Old Testament canon for Roman Catholics. The book contains no storyline but is rather a wide-ranging collection of wisdom sayings in various forms, including beatitudes and woes, warnings, poetry, proverbs, and more.

Today's first reading can be described as insights into speech, and they are part of

a larger section that describes the way certain actions can lead to losing one's friends and one's own integrity. The three images employed in today's reading are mostly agricultural, and they offer insight into the way words express identity. The most complex (and amusing) is the first. When an ox treads out the grain, its droppings contaminate the whole lot. Thus, a sieve is employed to separate the husks (i.e., excrement) from the grain. Human speech functions in a similar manner by revealing the insight (grain), as well as the faults (filth), of the speaker. The second and third images

are more obvious: just as fire tests a pot, so does conversation test and reveal a person's character; just as a well-tended tree produces good fruit, so also a well-tended mind produces good speech, and the opposite is also true. Finally, Sirach wisely concludes that one should not rush to praise another person before testing the person in speech.

READING II

Continuing from the previous weeks, today's second reading brings Paul's defense of Christ's resurrection and its consequences to a

Corinthians = kohr-IN-thee-uhnz

Read the first few lines slowly, with attention to the parallel words of comparison and the way that they build to fulfillment in victory over death.

Pause after the word "about" to create a space before the quotation. Let your voice communicate Paul's impassioned argument.

The power of victory comes, of course, from God. Emphasize "God" and "Lord Jesus Christ" as the source of victory, before moving to a tone of encouragement for the final sentence.

Take your time through this initial section, focusing on the progress of a disciple.

Without overdoing it, let a tone of gentle amusement at the absurdity of this example inform your proclamation.

conclusion. In last Sunday's reading, Paul clearly distinguished between the image of the first Adam that is of the flesh and the second Adam that is spiritual. It is that second image that is the subject of resurrection. But he had not explained how this would be accomplished.

In the verses between last week's reading and this week's reading, Paul describes the mysterious transformation that must take place because "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does corruption inherit incorruption" (1 Corinthians 15:50). He accomplishes this

by employing vivid Jewish apocalyptic language: "in the blink of an eye, at the last trumpet . . . the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (15:52).

Simultaneous with this necessary transformation is the fulfillment of Scripture. In today's reading, Paul includes a citation that combines Isaiah 25:8 with Hosea 13:14. Employing a Jewish interpretation technique called *gezera shawah* (where multiple passages interpret one another through a link word), Paul reflects on the link word "death." The transformation, which will be completed at the parousia (Christ's second

coming), not only makes creation incorruptible and immortal, it also robs death of its power, its sting, and its victory. Thus, the Corinthians and all subsequent believers are invited to embrace this truth: the seeds of transformation are already sown in all the baptized and will come to fruition at the end of time. Paul concludes with a final doxology, giving thanks to God who has accomplished all of this, and he encourages his readers to stand steadfast in what God has begun in them.

READING II 1 Corinthians 15:54–58

A reading from the first Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians

Brothers and sisters:

When **this** which is **corruptible** clothes itself
with **incorruptibility**

and **this** which is **mortal** clothes itself with **immortality**,
then the word that is **written** shall come **about**:

Death is swallowed up in victory.

Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?

The **sting** of death is **sin**,

and the **power** of sin is the **law**.

But **thanks** be to **God** who **gives** us the victory
through our **Lord Jesus Christ**.

Therefore, my beloved **brothers and sisters**,

be **firm**, **steadfast**, always fully **devoted** to the work
of the Lord,

knowing that in the Lord your labor is **not in vain**.

GOSPEL Luke 6:39–45

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke

Jesus told his disciples a **parable**,

"Can a **blind** person guide a blind person?

Will not **both** fall into a pit?

No disciple is **superior** to the teacher;

but when fully trained,

every disciple will be **like** his teacher.

Why do you notice the **splinter** in your **brother's** eye,

but do not perceive the **wooden beam** in your **own**? >>

Jesus moves us from an awareness of our own "beams" to an understanding that our inner lives are visible in our outer lives (fruit). The language is metaphorical, so read this section slowly.

Rather than only being a contrast between good and evil, this final sentence is still focused on the fruit that is produced by a person's life. Let your words highlight the relationship between who we are on the inside and the fruit we produce in the world.

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?
 You **hypocrite!** Remove the wooden beam from your eye **first**;
 then you will see **clearly**
 to remove the **splinter** in your brother's eye.

"A **good** tree does not bear **rotten** fruit,
 nor does a **rotten** tree bear **good** fruit.
 For **every** tree is known by its **own** fruit.
 For people do not pick **figs** from **thornbushes**,
 nor do they gather **grapes** from **brambles**.
 A **good person** out of the store of goodness in his **heart**
produces good,
 but an evil person out of a store of evil **produces** evil;
 for from the **fullness** of the **heart** the mouth **speaks**."

GOSPEL

Today's Gospel passage is from the conclusion of Luke's Sermon on the Plain, an important collection of Jesus' teaching directed at his disciples. Beginning with beatitudes and woes, Jesus' teaching goes on to include his radical command to love as God loves and his direction to engage in human interactions using the lens of God's compassion and graciousness. He concludes with wisdom that emphasizes self-examination and action over speech.

Today's reading consists of a series of proverbs (despite being called a parable).

Each challenges the disciple to a sincere self-examination before interacting with others. It is the insightful (not blind to self) disciple who leads others, whether they are blind or not. It is in fully knowing the way of the teacher, and following it, that the disciple teaches best. Correction begins with the corrector's own failings; only later can it be applied to another. Only if a disciple has replaced blindness with sight, walked in the ways of the master teacher, and acknowledged his own faults and remedied them will it be possible to produce the good fruit called for. Long

before one speaks or acts, it is necessary to know one's heart. It is only from that sanctified core, rooted in a relationship with the living God, that one dares to speak or act. S.L.