### **Readings for March 2, 2025 -- Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

It Starts With Me

*It is impossible for us to correct our faults if we are not willing to acknowledge them. However, we will bear good fruit if we are rooted in Christ, and striving to imitate him.*

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#### **Opening Prayer:**

Good and gracious God, we praise you and thank you for the gift of your Son who brings your message to each of us. Help us to take a closer look into our own hearts and actions. Open our hearts to hear the words that you speak to us, Lord, and to take them to heart. Help us to find our desert places this Lenten season. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

**Opening Thoughts:** Take 5 to 10 minutes to think about the following questions. (Share your thoughts with the group, if you are willing.)

This Lenten season, what are your hopes for making it a time that bears good fruit – a time of

clearing away the noise and finding ways to go into the desert with Jesus?

What things in your life might get in the way of this?

What areas of your life are most in need of God’s healing touch?

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#### **Reading 1  [SIR 27:4-7](http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/bible/Sirach/27%3A4)**

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  [PS 92:2-3, 13-14, 15-16](http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/bible/Psalms/92%3A2)**

**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.

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

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.

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

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.

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

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#### **Reading 2  [1 COR 15:54-58](http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/bible/1Corinthians/15%3A54)**

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.

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#### **Gospel  [LK 6:39-45](http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/bible/luke/6%3A39)**

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?

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."

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Related Reflections

**By Cackie Upchurch,**  Little Rock Scripture Study

Jesus used both lengthy and brief parables to teach because that was not unusual in his culture. Parables engaged listeners and moved them to ponder, to question, or to take action. In her commentary on the parables of Jesus, Amy Jill Levine reminds us that we might be better off “thinking less about what parables mean and more about what they can do: remind, provoke, refine, confront, disturb …”

In a brief section of the Sermon on the Plain in Luke’s Gospel and the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew’s Gospel, we find an excellent example. Jesus has been talking about hypocrites and false teachers and then says simply, “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” (Luke 6: 43-44; see also Matthew 7:17-18).

I have a distinct recollection of being in second grade and hearing my teacher talk about how you can tell a tree by its fruit. I assumed she was teaching us something about natural biology, something about the differences between pear trees and apple trees and peach trees. It seemed an obvious observation even to a 7- year-old. That simple truth from the natural world, however, reveals something profound about our nature as moral beings.

In its original Gospel context, this teaching was geared to serve as a sharp warning against hypocrites. It helped Jesus’ hearers evaluate those who claimed leadership roles as prophets and teachers. He was reminding his followers of a tool that had been tested over the centuries. The criterion for recognizing a true or false prophet had always been to look at their deeds. Isaiah and Jeremiah had both noted that the just ones produce good deeds while the deeds of the wicked will bring judgment upon them (see Isaiah 3:10; Jeremiah 17:10).

The parable of the tree and its fruit serves as a warning about leaders, including religious leaders. What is the message they preach? And how do their actions reflect what they say they believe? Is there continuity? It also serves as a kind of self-examination. Just as the fruit of a tree reveals its nature, and the health of that fruit gives evidence of the tree’s vitality, so the fruit of our lives offers evidence of who we are.

We might begin by considering what our words and actions say about us and about the God who lives within us. Is the fruit of our lives expressed in care for others or in self-centeredness? Are we producing words and deeds that communicate generosity or do they send a message that promotes greed? Are we working for justice for those on the margins or do our words and deeds further alienate those already left out? Do we communicate gentleness and peace or do our lives speak of chaos? What fruit do we produce?

Jesus goes on to say in Luke 6:45, “A good person out of the store of goodness in his heart produces good, but an evil person out of the store of evil produces evil; for from the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks.” In the ancient Mediterranean world where the Bible came to be, the heart was not simply the seat of one’s emotions. More importantly, it was the center of a person’s moral, intellectual and spiritual life. There is the suggestion here that we can become aware of our heart’s choices by paying attention to what we talk about and where we invest our energy and skills.

The words of Jesus remind us that truly moral living requires interior transformation, the kind of transformation that he offers as his words continue to speak to us today. A tree can enjoy all kinds of external conditions that are ideal — moderate rains, ample sunlight — but without being fed by rich nutrients in the soil, the fruit will not appear.

If this simple teaching using a tree and its fruit has evoked some kind of deeper thought within us, or a desire to examine our routine ways of acting and thinking, then the parable continues to do its job.

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***From Pope Francis: Follow the example of Jesus***

With the question: can a blind man lead a blind man?” ([Lk 6:39](https://bible.usccb.org/bible/luke/6?38)), Jesus wishes to emphasize that a leader cannot be blind, but must see clearly. That is, he must have wisdom in order to lead wisely, otherwise he risks causing damage to the people who are entrusted to him. Jesus thus calls attention to those who have educational responsibility or who govern: spiritual pastors, public authorities, legislators, teachers, parents, exhorting them to be aware of their delicate role and to always discern the right path on which to lead people.

A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully taught will be like his teacher” ([Lk 6:40](https://bible.usccb.org/bible/luke/6?39)). It is a call to follow his example and his teaching in order to be sound and wise leaders. And this teaching is included above all in the Sermon on the Mount — which, in the past three Sundays the liturgy has offered us in the Gospel—indicating the attitude of meekness and of mercy in order to be honest, humble and just people.

* Pope Francis, [*Angelus for Eighth Sunday*](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/angelus/2019/documents/papa-francesco_angelus_20190303.html)*,* March 13, 2019

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**Words From St. Cyril of Alexandria (died 444 AD)**

To destroy the ostentatious passion of boastfulness and stop people from trying to win greater honor than their teachers, Christ declared: The disciple is not above his teacher. Even if some should advance so far as to equal their teachers in holiness, they ought to remain within the limits set by them, and follow their example.

Paul also taught this when he said: Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ. So then, if the Master does not judge, why are you judging? He came not to judge the world, but to take pity on it. What he is saying, then, is this: “If I do not pass judgment, neither must you, my disciple. You may be even more guilty of the faults of which you accuse another. Will you not be ashamed when you come to realize this?” The Lord uses another illustration for the same teaching when he says: Why do you look for the speck in your brother's eye?

With compelling arguments, he persuades us that we should not want to judge others, but should rather examine our own hearts, and strive to expel the passions seated in them, asking this grace from God. He it is who heals the contrite of heart and frees us from our spiritual disorders. If your own sins are greater and worse than other people's, why do you censure them, and neglect what concerns yourself?

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**From Matthew Zurcher, S.J. (Published on Jesuitpost.org 2022)**

One of my surest paths to humiliation is to criticize you for doing something only moments before doing it myself. This week, Jesus challenges us to notice and remove the wooden beam in our own eyes before we try to help others with their splinters. Ever notice how the first thing we do at Mass is acknowledge our sinfulness? To be of any help to one another, we must take off our own blindfolds first.

With a Church, government, and public discourse wracked by hypocrisy and quick condemnation, we could use a healthy dose of this wisdom, myself included. I pray to always begin with humility and self-reflection.

We are united in our weakness and called to a posture of humble solidarity. This week, let’s ask Jesus to take off our blindfolds and practice this posture by first relating with those we want to criticize. Instead of condemning, let’s begin by saying to each other: *I know what it is like to struggle. I’m right here with you*. Perhaps the way out of our fallen urge to condemn is the tender companionship of weakness.

**Introspection:**

What does it mean for you to prioritize your own eye-beams rather than rush to others’ eye-specks? Both Luke’s and Matthew’s gospels describe our “logs” as compared to other people’s “splinters.” This saying of Jesus in both Matthew and Luke is placed in sermons that are at the core of Jesus’s ethical and moral teachings. Each of the gospel writers felt this teaching about our logs and others’ splinters was central to their story of Jesus.

If Jesus taught that we should begin changing our society by starting with ourselves, what would this mean for those of us who live in a social location of privilege in the present structure? Could this challenge our initial reflex of defensiveness and take a posture of listening to others? Where it goes from there will be different for each person, but we have to come to grips with the fact that the greatest obstacles to a safer, more just, more compassionate world for us will not be the dust in another’s eyes but the beams that are in our own.

For all of us who desire to lean more deeply into the teachings of Jesus and engage the work of making the world a safer, more just, more compassionate home for all, we cannot bypass the process of becoming more keenly aware of our own blind spots.

Herb Montgomery, Director of Renewed Heart Ministries, Patheos.com

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**Other thoughts:**

Hopefully, we all want to live good lives.  We all want to make a difference in our world and in the lives of others for the good.  But the fundamental question to ask is how do we do this?  The answer is that it’s not so much a matter of choosing the good actions we do; rather, on a more basic and fundamental level, we must choose to live a life grounded in Christ, thus becoming a “good tree.”

- Catholic daily reflections.com

Discussion Questions

What do you think might cause us to judge others, rather than seeing ourselves as clearly as we should?

Looking at the first reflection (from Little Rock) - do you agree that the power of a parable is found in what it evokes within us, not simply in what it means? Can you give an example of a parable that may have moved or touched you in a personal way?

Why does it seem that Jesus’ parables often make us uncomfortable, or give us a message that’s a challenge to follow? Think of the Parable of the Good Samaritan, or The Workers in the Vineyard (the ones who get equal pay, even though they don’t work the same number of hours).

Does looking at the reflection from St. Cyril help? (And also the words of Pope Francis?) Aren’t we called to be imitators of Jesus in our lives? And of course, this is not easy. That’s why we need to rely on God’s Grace to help us. Talk a little about these challenges.

**Thought for the week:** If I strive to remove the planks from my eyes (obstacles, pride, worldly habits, etc.), I can have better spiritual vision to:

* Help me see God’s active presence in the world
* Help me see how I can contribute to a more loving, peaceful world
* Help me be more myself before God, and in my prayer

**Closing prayer**

In our work that we do, and in our interactions with others, we pray, O Lord, for change. Change the easy peace we make with ourselves into discontent because of the oppression of others. Change our tendency to defend ourselves, into the freedom that comes from being forgiven and empowered through your love.

Change our need for disguises, excuses and images into the ability to be honest with ourselves, and open with one another. Change our inclination to judge others into a desire to serve and uplift others. And most of all, Lord, change our routine worship and work into a genuine encounter with you, so that we may see your face, and learn, and be imitators of you. Amen

 (Adapted from the Episcopal Church – Anti-Racism Book)

Weekly Focus Questions:

What was my “desert place” this week?

Was I able to see something new and green springing forth from this?

**Also, for the coming week, spend a little time with Fr. Raab’s essay on the Intro Page, and with the scripture from Genesis. Remind yourself that God can bring forth newness of life – even in the parched and barren “desert places” in our lives.**