



THE MISSION OF SAINT MARY MAGDALENE

Father Alan's Blog

For the Eighth Sunday After Trinity - July 25, 2021

"Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them."

St. Matthew 7:20 (NIV)

Often, we find out exactly what we are made of by what comes out of our mouths – in both good and bad circumstances. Case in point:

There once was a good, law-abiding citizen who, during rush hour, was being tailgated by a stressed-out man on a busy street, when, suddenly, the traffic light at the intersection just in front of them turned yellow. The law-abiding citizen did the right thing by immediately slowing down and stopping at the crosswalk, even though she could have beaten the red light by gunning her car through the intersection. The tailgating man, meanwhile, hit the roof – **and his horn**. He started screaming in frustration because he had missed his chance to get through the intersection. He was still in mid-rant, alternately pounding the steering wheel and gesturing to the woman in front of him, when he heard a tap on his window and looked up into the serious face of a police officer. The officer ordered the man to exit the car with his hands up and proceeded to slap a pair of handcuffs on him. Then the officer took the man to the police station, where he was searched, fingerprinted, photographed, and locked up in a holding cell. After a couple of hours, another police

officer approached the jail cell, unlocked, and opened the door, and escorted the still frustrated (but somewhat chastened) man back to the booking desk, where the arresting officer, who was waiting with the man's personal effects, said to him:

"I'm very sorry for my mistake. You see, I pulled up behind your car while you were blowing your horn, flipping off the lady in front of you, and cursing a blue streak. Then I noticed the 'Choose Life' license plate holder, the 'What Would Jesus Do?' bumper sticker, the 'Follow Me to Sunday School' bumper sticker, and the chrome-plated Christian fish emblem on the trunk. Naturally, I assumed you had stolen the car."



In the late 1970's, Bradley - the Automotive Division of Thor Corporation - sold a fiberglass body that fit perfectly onto a VW beetle chassis. The body was very modern in style and design, giving the impression that it was an expensive sports car. Thus, on the outside, the car looked expensive and showy, but on the inside, it was still just a VW beetle.



That sounds a lot like some people doesn't it - showy on the outside but not so hot on the inside? "All fluff and no substance" as some might say? Sometimes there is a BIG difference between the inside and the outside of a person; in fact, people readily see it as a type of falsehood, or lying, or, often, the utmost in **hypocrisy**, particularly when it comes to those who say they belong to the flock of "The Good Shepherd." To this end, one internet blogger recently wrote the following:

"I no longer associate myself with the institution of the Christian Church. As well, a belief, at all, that some supernatural power is in control of our lives has faded from my conscious behavior. Not that what the faith has at its core isn't some value to us as humans, but because too many within the faith represent the worst of humanity."

Ouch!

When we have a change in conduct and character in our lives, it is a type of "spiritual fruit." However, that fruit can be either good or bad. Hence, St. Paul exhorts us in Galatians 5:22-23a:

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control."

Accordingly (and to be brutally frank), a true Christian's life should be characterized by these good spiritual qualities.



At this juncture, I thought it might be helpful to pause and take a minute to assess where each one of us is in our own lives at this very moment by asking ourselves the following questions:

- ☞ Am I producing good spiritual fruit, or is the opposite true?
- ☞ Instead of love, is there hatred bitterness or even prejudice in my life?
- ☞ Instead of joy, is there constant gloom?
- ☞ Instead of peace, is there turmoil?
- ☞ Instead of kindness, is there a short temper?
- ☞ Instead of faithfulness, is there endless worry?
- ☞ Instead of gentleness, is there pride and arrogance?
- ☞ Instead of self-control, am I a victim of my own passions?

If we answered “Yes” to most or all of these questions, then, perhaps, we ought to consider either making a commitment or a recommitment (as the case may be) to Jesus Christ as Lord of our lives. **If we call ourselves Christian, then people should be able to look for – and find – good spiritual fruit in our lives.** For a true disciple of Jesus Christ will produce good spiritual fruit. Moreover, Jesus Himself was exceedingly clear on this point when He declared in St. John 15:8:

“My true disciples produce much fruit. This brings great glory to my Father.”

And again, in today’s Gospel Lesson from St. Matthew 7, our Lord Jesus also definitively pronounced (in verse 20) to the multitude assembled to hear His “Sermon on the Mount:”

“Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.”



The metaphor of bearing fruit is used often in Holy Scripture. For example, in the “Parable of the Sower” (St. Mark 4:1-20), Jesus spoke of seed that falls on four different types of soil, representing different reactions that people have to the truth of the Gospel message. The fourth and final category that Jesus first mentioned in verse 8, and again in verse 20, was “good soil:”

“Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop – some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown.”

In other words, those who have real spiritual health are those who embrace the truth of the Gospel and produce good fruit. Accordingly, Holy Scripture provides us with a few different illustrations as to

what “bearing fruit” means. For instance (in St. Matthew 3:8), St. John the Baptist urges his listeners (and us, as well) to:

“Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.”

Worshipping, praising, and thanking God are also ways of bearing fruit in our lives, as the author of the Letter to the Hebrews points out in 13:15:

“Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise – the fruit of lips that openly profess his name.”

Simply put, therefore, when we openly praise God, we are bearing good fruit.

To illustrate, Greg Laurie (a senior minister with Harvest Ministries) tells the following story:

“At one of our church services, I noticed a young woman in the front row who was in a wheelchair. Her legs were gone, and she had only one arm, which was a partial one. As we were worshipping, this young woman lifted what she had of her arm to the Lord. I thought about how this must have pleased God. She didn't have hands to lift, but what she had, she lifted up to the Lord. Did she have troubles in her life? Did she have difficulty? Of course, she did. But she offered a sacrifice of praise to God.”

It is important not to miss the point being made here. We do not praise God only when we are in the mood to do so; rather, we praise God simply because He is worthy of our praise. Our word “worship” comes from the Old English form “worth-ship.” Consequently, we praise that which is “worthy.” To reiterate, then, we do not praise God because we happen to feel like it on a particular day, **we praise God because He alone deserves our praise.** (And when we do this, by the way, we are bearing good fruit.)

What we say is also a type of fruit in our lives. In the “Sermon on the Plain” (St. Luke’s version – found in St. Luke 6 – of St. Matthew’s “Sermon on the Mount”), Jesus, in verse 45, cautioned His listeners:

“The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.”

So mark this down:

Whether we are ordained ministers, or members of the laity, when we say we are true Christians, it will be reflected most often by what we say (which, incidentally, is also a type of bearing fruit).



The point is this:

Can others identify good spiritual fruit in our lives?

- ☞ **For we need to remember that people are watching us.**
- ☞ **And that they are listening to us.**
- ☞ **Let’s hope that we are pointing them toward Jesus.**
- ☞ **And that by our fruit the world will recognize us – and Him.**



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