



THE MISSION OF SAINT MARY MAGDALENE

Father Alan's Blog

For the Fourth Sunday After Trinity - June 27, 2021

"Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven."

St. Luke 6:37 (NIV)

I once came across the following poem, penned by an anonymous poet:

*"I was shocked, confused, bewildered
As I entered Heaven's door,
Not by the beauty of it all,
Nor the lights or its décor.
But it was the folks in Heaven
Who made me sputter and gasp -
The thieves, the liars, the sinners,
The alcoholics and the trash.*

*"There stood the kid from seventh grade
Who swiped my lunch money twice.
Next to him was my old neighbour
Who never said anything nice.
Herb, who I always thought
Was rotting away in hell,
Was sitting pretty on cloud nine,
Looking incredibly well.*

*"I nudged Jesus, 'What's the deal?
I would love to hear Your take.
How'd all these sinners get up here?
God must've made a mistake.
And why is everyone so quiet,
So somber - give me a clue.'
'Hush, child,' He said, 'they're all in shock.
No one thought they'd be seeing you.'"*



Today's Gospel Lesson (St. Luke 6:36-42) is excerpted from our Lord Jesus Christ's "Sermon on the Plain" (St. Luke 6:17-49). While much shorter in length, this passage of Holy Scripture parallels Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount" (found in St. Matthew 5-7). Of note, both sermons begin with "The Beatitudes":

- † *"Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*
- † *Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.*
- † *Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.*
- † *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.*
- † *Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.*
- † *Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.*
- † *Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.*
- † *Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven..."*,

and end with the "Lesson of the Builders" (that is, those who chose to

build their houses upon the rock or upon the sand). In any event, in today's Gospel Lesson, Jesus uses **hyperbole** to make a point to His disciples - hyperbole being an exaggerated statement that is not intended to be taken literally. In fact, Jesus often used hyperbole in making points to people, as in St. Matthew 18:8-9, wherein Jesus says:

"If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or feet and be thrown into eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell."

In making His point, Jesus certainly wasn't advocating **mutilation**; He was merely trying to stress the importance of **eternal things** over **temporal things**. Likewise, in today's Gospel Lesson when Jesus exhorted His disciples not to judge or condemn, He was merely reproving the unjust and hypocritical judging of others. However, He was not in any way shape or form relieving His followers of the need for discerning right and wrong. And for proof we need not look any further than verses 43-45 (the verses that immediately follow today's Gospel Lesson), wherein Jesus further instructs His disciples:

"No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of."

Thus, we are able (and divinely called) to discern good or bad intent in people in two ways:

- ☞ **by their actions; and**
- ☞ **by what they produce.**

Meaning that if they tend to be pleasantly about the business of producing “good fruit” (such as unity, or harmony, or joy, for instance), they must be, essentially, people of “good intent.” Conversely, if they tend to be obnoxiously about the business of miserably producing “bad fruit” (such as schisms, or dissension, or malice, for example), they must be, essentially, people of “bad intent.” Moreover, according to Jesus, a good tree can only produce good fruit, And, likewise, a bad tree can only produce bad fruit. Indeed, Jesus gives us the means by which we can discern the true hearts of others when He explains to us (in St. Matthew 7:16) that:

“By their fruit you will recognize them.”

Nevertheless, as I pointed out earlier in our Gospel Lesson for today, Jesus draws a clear distinction between:

- ☞ **discerning intent in people; and**
- ☞ **judging or condemning them.**

Here’s the point: **God doesn’t completely write people off for the wrongs they do, and neither should we** – for two reasons. Firstly, we are as bad as (if not worse than) they are. As a wise person once said:

“Don’t judge people just because they sin differently than you.”

Or as Jesus Himself admonishes in verses 41-42 of today’s Gospel Lesson:

“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”

Jesus is not mincing words here. If Almighty God doesn't write us off as "lost efforts" for the wrongs we do, just who are we to write anyone else off?

Secondly, God is not done with us yet – any of us – and here's why:

☞ **God alone can see the full extent of the consequences of our choices even before they are made.**

Why? Because God IS. God transcends time and space. God never WAS. And He never WILL BE. God just IS. In short, God can see everything, all at once. Everything – from beginning to end – **all at once**. Thus, God **alone** sees all the circumstances that conspired to cause a person to choose a certain course of action.

So, why do we do bad things? **God knows!**

We can't help the wrongs that are done to us in this life (they are certainly not our fault!), but we CAN help the things we choose to do as a result of those wrongs done to us. In other words, when I sin, I can't use as an excuse that I was previously hurt by someone or something (that just doesn't wash). But here's the Good News (which, by the way, I already proclaimed just a few short sentences ago):

God is not done with us yet – any of us.

As I said last week, God is the One Who:

- † **sees us;**
- † **watches over us; and**
- † **agonizes for us,**

every second of our entire earthly lives.

Only our omniscient God can see where we've been and where we're

headed. And He alone knows how we will turn out in the end. That's why we are not to judge or condemn anyone, for only God is perfectly qualified for that job.



And yet we do judge. We do condemn. Why?

To paraphrase author Max Lucado (from Chapter 26 of his 1987 book, "God Came Near", and Chapter 41 of his 1985 book, "On the Anvil", respectively):

Why are we so often insensitive to (and oblivious to) the needs and the situations of others? For our insensitive judgements often cause wounds that heal excruciatingly slowly, if at all. It's bad enough when someone hurts our feelings intentionally, but it's something else again if someone accidentally bruises our soul. For instance:

- ☞ **someone criticizes a person (who also happens to be a dear friend of yours) and then offers a lame half-apology ("Oh, I'm sorry. I forgot the two of you were so close."); or**
- ☞ **someone tells a joke at a party about your ethnic group - you hear the joke, and you try to smile politely, while your heart sinks; or**
- ☞ **someone chooses to wash your dirty laundry in public ("Jane, is it true that you and John are separated?").**

Insensitive comments. Thoughts that should have remained thoughts. Feelings which had no business being expressed aloud. Opinions carelessly tossed like a hand grenade into a crowd.

And if we were to tell the one who threw these inconsiderate darts about the pain that he (or she) caused, his (or her) response would most likely be:

☠ *“Oh, but I had no intention – I didn’t realize you were so sensitive!”*

(As if it was somehow your fault.)

Or, even worse, he (or she) might say something like:

☠ *“I forgot you were here.”*

(As if it would have somehow been OK to say such things in the first place, had you not shown the poor judgement of – what – **being there to hear them?!?**)

Make no mistake about it: insensitive, judgemental comments and slurs are the products of:

- ☠ **gossip;**
- ☠ **accusations;**
- ☠ **resentment;**
- ☠ **impatience;**
- ☠ **self-centredness;**
- ☠ **egotism;**
- ☠ **pride;**
- ☠ **disregard;**
- ☠ **disrespect;**
- ☠ **disappointment;**
- ☠ **callousness; and**
- ☠ **lack of love.**

Insensitivity is so subtle:

☠ *“Hey, it’s just a slip of the tongue, just a lapse of memory. No one is at fault. C’mon, there’s no REAL harm done, right?”*

Wrong!

For as the so-called “innocent” attackers go on their merry way, excusing themselves for the things they’ve said (or done) without any blatantly “hurtful” intentions, a wounded soul is left in the dust, utterly confused, and wondering:

💧 *“If no one intended to hurt me, then why do I hurt so badly?”*

In addition to today’s Gospel Lesson (from St. Luke 6:36-42), God’s Holy Word has strong medicine for those who choose to carelessly wag their tongues, such as:

- ✝ *“The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.” (St. James 3:6); or*
- ✝ *“When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise.” (Proverbs 10:19);*
- ✝ *“He who guards his lips guards his life, but he who speaks rashly will come to ruin.” (Proverbs 13:3); or*
- ✝ *“He who guards his mouth and his tongue keeps himself from calamity.” (Proverbs 21:23).*

The message is clear: we who dare to call ourselves Christians and “God’s ambassadors” are not afforded the luxury of judging through the use of idle words. Excuses such as:

- ☠ *“I didn’t know you were here”; or*
- ☠ *“I didn’t realize this was...so...touchy”,*

are woefully shallow when they come from those who claim to be followers of – and imitators of – our Lord Jesus Christ:

- 🕯 *“The Light of the World”;*
- 👤 *“The Good Shepherd”;*
- 👐 *“The Healer”;* and
- 🩺 *“The Great Physician”.*

We, especially, have an added responsibility to guard our tongues.

Therefore:

- 👍 **Let's never tell jokes that slander;**
- 👍 **Let's never say anything about people in their absence that we wouldn't say in their presence;**
- 👍 **Let's never say anything about someone unless he or she is there to respond;**
- 👍 **Let's refuse to listen to someone else's gossip;**
- 👍 **Let's initiate positive statements about people who we're discussing; and**
- 👍 **Let's never forget: "The tongue is a fire."**

Insensitive, judgemental comments and slurs may, sometimes, be accidental.

But they are **never** excusable.



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