

Text: Sirach 27:4-7; Luke 6:39-45  
Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle C  
3 March 2019  
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No one could escape the news this week of the testimony of Michael Cohen, President Trump's former lawyer, to Congress about his former boss. The thing is, apart from whatever Mr. Cohen accused the President of, each of us already had come to our own opinion of the President's personal character from the words the President himself has spoken. An interesting thing about Mr. Cohen's testimony was said by Peggy Noonan, the Catholic political commentator who wrote a biography of Pope John Paul II titled, *John Paul the Great*. Peggy Noonan said, "I suspect...no one, friend of the president or foe, love him or hate him, thinks Mr. Trump has a high personal character or an especially admirable back story." (*Wall Street Journal*, March 2-3, 2019)

This is not a political comment, but a comment about human nature, which the Bible speaks to today. None of us can hide from ourselves, or hide our true selves from others in the end. The truth of who we are always will be revealed, by what we say and do.

This is the sieve I use at home to sift out what I don't want in what I'm cooking - the impurities remain in it when shaken. And today, in the First Reading, the Book of Sirach wonderfully uses this image of a sieve sifting grain to illustrate how the impurities in us are revealed when we speak: "When a sieve is shaken, the husks appear; so do one's faults when one speaks." Sirach today is full of great images of how our true selves appear. If a potter puts a clay pot in the furnace to fire it, and it shatters in the furnace, the faults of the pot are revealed in its test by fire. In the same way, Sirach says, "Tribulation is the test of the just. Praise no one *before* he speaks, for it is [when they speak] that people are tested." And Jesus warns us today in the Gospel, "A good person out of the store of goodness in their heart produces good, but an evil person out of a store of evil [in their heart] produces evil; for from the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks." What are our hearts filled with? Hate, jealousy, caring, compassion, judgment, anger, kindness, sympathy, pride, humility? Or - most likely - a mixture? It all will come out. We cannot hide our true selves from others, just as - if we are honest with ourselves- none of us can hide who we are from ourselves.

Nor can we hide ourselves from God. He made us, and he knows with what we have filled up our hearts, before we speak. And knowing all that, God so loves us he sends his Son to rescue us from our worst selves and works to make us, his children, our best selves. St Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome, “God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8)

Lent begins on Wednesday – Ash Wednesday. I think of the Season of Lent as “spring training” for Christians: a time to get back in shape as Christians if we’ve let things slide during the year, and to use all the opportunities of Lent – to pray, repent, confess, fast, give – to then cooperate with God’s love to fill our hearts with good things, and resemble more and more the kind of person God thinks we can be. There is a prayer that has been around for a thousand years, and still is prayed today, because this prayer is more applicable than ever to the lives we may try to hide from ourselves and from others. This prayer could be the theme for our Lent. This prayer that goes:

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.