

Friday (Cardinal Basil Hume)

The layperson finds his or her role principally in those circumstances of everyday life where their life and work place them. As husbands and wives, parents, as workers or professional people, in local communities and on a wider stage, the laity help to sanctify their surroundings, their families, their workplace, the communities of which they are members. They do it by the witness of their lives, the silent effect of their presence at the heart of secular life, and by the influence of their words and action aimed at creating a more just and humane society. This is the lay vocation: to bring society back to God; to offer it to him as a living sacrifice of praise.

Scripture (1 Peter 4:10-11)

Each one of you has received a special grace, so, like good stewards responsible for all these gifts of God, put it at the service of others. If anyone is a speaker, let it be as the words of God, if anyone serves, let it be as in strength granted by God; so that in everything God may receive the glory, through Jesus Christ, since to him alone belong all glory and power for ever an ever.

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8th week of Ordinary Time

When people meet you, do they ‘Taste and see that the Lord is good’?

Whenever people talk about Pope Francis’ call for us to be a missionary church, people always worry that they are being asked to preach, or to speak out about faith, (‘I haven’t the confidence’, ‘I don’t know enough’, ‘people don’t want to know’ etc). We don’t have to get on a soapbox, or to talk at length about Church teaching or the Bible, but we do have to realise that the moment people know you are a Christian, you are already ‘preaching’. People will draw conclusions about Christianity from the type of person you are, or, as Jesus is puts it, ‘Every tree can be told by its own fruit’. (Luke 6:39-45).

Jesus’ question about why his disciples want to take the splinters out of other people’s eyes but not noticing the plank in their own points to a tendency for religion to tell people what they can and can’t do. This was obvious in the Pharisees, and is certainly present in our Faith today, but pointing out people’s faults and giving them rules must not be the starting point for his followers. The message Jesus brings, and that they are to spread, is about a new relationship with God, and no one can become a teacher unless they have first learnt what they are teaching for themselves – ‘the fully trained disciple will be like the teacher’.

We must, to borrow from Daniel O’Leary, ‘begin with the heart’. Until we accept Jesus’ teaching at the core of our lives, (become ‘beatitude people’), we cannot teach others the wisdom and joy of living in Jesus’ way. As an example, I might say to someone, ‘you should turn the other cheek’, but if they know that I’m quick to take revenge – or run away! – I am not teaching anything; I’m repeating a mantra which has no depth.

Sira, the author of Ecclesiasticus, is clear that the words a person speaks not only tell what they really believe, the ‘defects of a person appear in their talk.’ (Eccl 27:4-7). He actually compares what comes out of our mouths with the rubbish left in a sieve, which I found rather surprising and disturbing because I generally think that what comes out of my mouth has been sieved to keep the rubbish in. Thinking about it, though, Sira is right: what I say, and the way I say it, is shaped by what is in the heart. An obvious example is when a person is angry, it comes out in the words spoken ‘in the heat of the moment’. Also, the bigot, the misogynist, the schemer are all betrayed by their words – so why wouldn’t the same apply to the disciple? I may ‘talk a good game’ because I’ve learned the bible, the catechism, etc, but people will know if this comes from the head or the heart.

Jesus also says that words flow out of what fills the heart, and ‘A good person draws what is good from the store of goodness in the heart’, and what is bad from the same place!

What is at the heart of my life is the soil that produces fruit. Before I can tell or show other people anything about the relationship with the loving God I profess to believe in, I must learn to live in that relationship myself. I don’t have to be perfect before I start – seeing my own faults and failings and allowing them to be healed by the compassionate God may actually be the most important message I can give anyone – and I don’t have to worry about ‘the end product’. Pope Francis calls us to renew our relationship with Jesus every day; if I do that, (and if we as a church do that), we don’t have to worry about producing good fruit - it will happen. If we don’t worry cultivate this relationship, the opposite is also true.

Martin Bennett

Monday (Fr. George Aschenbrenner, SJ: The Examen)

God reveals himself in our feelings as much as he does in our clear and distinct ideas. If we want to find God more intimately, we must let him draw us at the core of our being, which means becoming more aware of our feelings. Here we recognise God's ceaseless invitation to come closer, to be more like him to be at one with him. We are also conscious of the resistance to him, which arises from sin in ourselves and in the world around us. We are not talking about feelings on the surface, but about movements deep in our hearts, where God has placed his word. If we stay away from the depths where we are truly ourselves, we shall miss much that the Spirit is saying to us. At the level of our deeper and more lasting feelings we discover ourselves and our real relationship with God.

Scripture (Luke 6:39-42)

Jesus told a parable to them, "Can one blind man guide another? Surely both will fall into a pit? The disciple is not superior to the teacher; the fully trained disciple will always be like the teacher. Why do you observe the splinter in your neighbour's eye and not notice the plank in your own? How can you say to your neighbour, 'Let me take out the splinter that is in your eye,' when you cannot see the plank in your own? Hypocrite! Take the plank out of your own eye first, and then you will see clearly enough to take out the splinter that is in your neighbour's eye.'

Tuesday (Evelyn Underhill)

St. John of the Cross says that every quality or virtue which the Spirit really produces in our souls has three distinguishing characters: Tranquillity, Gentleness, Strength. If we desire a simple test of the quality of our spiritual life, a consideration of the tranquillity, gentleness and strength with which we deal with the circumstances our outward life will serve us better than anything that is based on the loftiness of our religious notions, or fervour of our religious feelings. Tranquillity, gentleness and strength, carrying us through the changes of weather, the ups and downs of the route, the varied surface of the road; the inequalities of family life, emotional and professional disappointments, the sudden intervention of bad fortune or bad health, the rising and falling of our religious temperature: this is the threefold imprint of the Spirit on the souls surrendered to His great action.

Scripture (Ecclesiasticus 24:4-7)

In a shaken sieve the rubbish is left behind, so too the defects of a person appear in their talk. The kiln tests the work of the potter; the test of a man is in his conversation. The orchard where the tree grows is judged on the quality of its fruit, similarly a person's words betray what they feel. Do not praise someone before they have spoken since this is the test of people.

Wednesday (Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium)

The primary reason for evangelizing is the love of Jesus which we have received, the experience of salvation which urges us to ever greater love of him. If we do not feel an intense desire to share this love, we need to pray insistently that he will once more touch our hearts. We need to implore his grace daily, asking him to open our cold hearts and shake up our lukewarm and superficial existence. How much good it does us when he once more touches our lives and impels us to share his new life! The best incentive for sharing the Gospel comes from contemplating it with love, lingering over its pages and reading it with the heart. If we approach it in this way, its beauty will amaze and constantly excite us. There is nothing more precious which we can give to others.

Scripture (1 Jn 1:1-3).

Something which has existed since the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our own eyes, which we have watched and touched with our own hands, the Word of life – this is our theme. That life was made visible; we saw it and are giving our testimony, declaring to you the eternal life, which was present to the Father and has been revealed to us. We are declaring to you what we have seen and heard, so that you too may share our life. Our life is shared with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

Thursday (Caryll Houselander)

To talk to someone about God, Christians need to learn their faith literally *by heart*, and then to pray daily that they may never fall into the temptation of merely showing off their knowledge and that what they are striving to give will always be God and not themselves. There is a way of convincing a person that puts them off. Christianity is represented to the person not as life in which their own life will grow and flower, but as a set of dogmas which must be swallowed whole like vitamin pills. The person's head cannot answer them. Their heart rebels. It seems easier to forgo the certainty of Faith than the touch in darkness that is the sweetness of life.

Scripture (Luke 6:43-45)

There is no sound tree that produces rotten fruit, nor again a rotten tree that produces sound fruit. For every tree can be told by its own fruit: people do not pick figs from thorns, nor gathers grapes from brambles. A good person draws what is good from the store of goodness in their heart; a bad person draws what is bad from the store of badness. For a person's words flow out of what is in their heart.