

EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

By Al Mansfield

Sirach 27:4-7

Psalm 92

1 Corinthians 15:54-58

Luke 6:39-45

TESTING FOR FRUIT AND CHARACTER

Sometimes fruit may look good at first glance. Closer inspection, however, reveals that it's bruised or even...rotten! People can be the same way. But true character is usually revealed by a person's speech, especially unguarded speech.

SIRACH

Our first reading from Sirach is about shaking and testing. "When a sieve is shaken, the husks appear; so do one's faults when one speaks."

How do we react when trials come our way? That is a true measure of our character. We judge a tree by the fruit it produces. So, too, we can judge a person's character by his or her speech.

The Responsorial, Psalm 92, refers to "the palm tree" and the "cedar of Lebanon." Just as trees flourish in a good environment, so do those who are planted in the house of the Lord.

GOSPEL

Today's gospel is a teaching in true discipleship. It's all about having personal integrity and avoiding hypocrisy. We cannot presume to correct the faults of others until and unless we have dealt with our own.

If our "tree," that is to say, our character, is good and sound, then what we produce will be good and sound as well. "Character is destiny," it is said. Our speech is a window that reveals what lies in our heart.

1 CORINTHIANS

Our second reading continues St. Paul's teaching on the resurrection. He tells us about the great change and exchange that will take place: corruptible for incorruptibility; mortal for immortality; death for victory!

Paul, in characteristic fashion, sends out a mocking challenge to death: "O death, where is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"

Paul ends with a burst of thanksgiving to God and an exhortation to "be firm, steadfast, always devoted to the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord, your labor is not in vain." Thanks be to God, indeed!

TESTING OURSELVES

This Sunday is a good lead-in to the Lenten season, which begins very shortly. During Lent we will be looking at areas of our life which might need improving. The lesson presented this Sunday has to do with our heart and our speech. What we say indicates what is in our heart. As we examine our speech patterns, we will get a true picture of the condition of our heart.

Perhaps this would be a good Lenten prayer for all of us: "Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips" (Psalm 141:3). Change my heart, O God, so that I might improve my speech.