



EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

CYCLE C

Sirach 27:4-7

1 Corinthians 15:54-58

Luke 6:39-45

GATHERING

(A small arrangement of fresh fruits, preferably figs and grapes, a few scattered toothpicks or a piece of wood, and a pair of tweezers are set on a cloth-covered table in the center of the group.)

The scripture readings this week call us to authenticity in our speech and actions that will speak even louder than words. Last Sunday's readings spoke to us of the need to be forgiven and forgiving, and to stop judging others. *(Members share with one another what measures they have measured with during the past week and how they have opened up to opportunities for daily forgiveness.)*

OPENING PRAYER

(The facilitator invites the members of the community to a time of silence, saying, "Sisters and brothers, let us acknowledge that we are in the presence of God." The facilitator or another designated member reads the poem that follows.)

The Bystanders

Always they sit
At the center of things,
Circles of conversation,
Camps of opinion,
Themselves so long
Housed on the outskirts
Of their own emotions they
Occupy there
Merely such neutral ground
As keeps the peace
Or honor. They leave
No fingermarks
On what their hands touch.
Their story is how they
Sidestep involvement, how
They stay of two minds
And how finding
Themselves at last
Out in the open,
Maneuverings unsuccessful,
They answer only
What they don't feel,
What they don't know,
What they are not.

John William Corrington and Miller Williams, ed., **Southern Writing in the Sixties: *The Bystanders*** by Charles Wright, (Louisiana State University Press, 1967). Used with permission.

(An instrumental selection is played while the community meditates on the poem. After some time of quiet the community prays as follows.)

Leader: Gracious, God, we thank you for calling us together in this time and place. As a community of faith, may we be open to your Spirit at work in us and among us. May we be sustained by your word and challenged by the witness of those gathered here. May we be guided by your wisdom as we reflect on our lives and your word during this time together. We thank you

and praise you, gracious God, for Jesus, who came to show us how to live and love.

All: Amen.

Author Unknown

Focus Question

When have you said one thing but done another?

SCRIPTURE SHARING AND REFLECTION

(The scriptures are proclaimed aloud with a pause between readings.)

Commentary

Rush Limbaugh, Dr. Laura, Larry King, Sam Donaldson, Kathleen Parker, Ellen Goodman, John Rosemond, Louis Rukeyser, Mother Angelica, Don Imus, Andrew Greeley, Oprah, Regis, Rosie, Judge Judy – talk, talk, words, words, opinion, opinion. In our era of mass communication, we have access to the “bent of [some]one’s mind” (Sirach 27:7) at the flip of a dial and the turn of a page. While few of us would want to consider ourselves disciples of media personalities, the voices of these commentators on popular culture are undoubtedly influencing those around us. At the same time, one of the hallmarks of a cultivated, mature person is the ability to analyze and critique, to ask questions and to test the validity of a statement. With information doubling itself at an ever faster pace, such testing may become an overwhelming task, or, for the lazy among us, too much bother even to attempt. This week’s scriptures give us sound advice in helping to discern what is of worth and what is not, and how to speak with authenticity in light of what we hear.

The passages from both Sirach and Luke address speech as a sure key to character, speech as an expression of the heart. Like pottery in the furnace, flaws become evident in the kiln of conversation. Speech conveys what has formed and shaped us, and our internal values will determine the quality of the fruit of our speech. While instructing his disciples about love of enemies and sharing one’s goods with the poor, Jesus here continues with parables about enlightened leadership, formed discipleship, avoiding hypocrisy in correcting others and bringing faith into action;

internal values that should shape a disciple's speech if it is to have authenticity.¹ As disciples of Christ, we are challenged to follow the example of the teacher and to attend to our own shortcomings even as we address the flaws of those around us. Our words and actions will reveal our inner beliefs.

It may be true that actions speak louder than words, but when words can so powerfully convey our thinking and our values, shouldn't we choose them with great care?

FAITH SHARING AND INTEGRATION

(The community pauses in silence for several minutes to ponder the scriptures and the questions that follow.)

- ◆ What makes speech or a speech memorable for you?
- ◆ In what situations does language interfere with your ability to truly understand?
- ◆ What circumstances cause you to hesitate in stating your opinion on a matter?
- ◆ What values have been made evident to you in the kiln of your small community's conversation?
- ◆ When you look for examples of enlightened leadership in your life today, who comes to mind?
- ◆ As you look ahead to self-reflection and renewal during the Lenten season which begins next week, what wooden beams need to be removed from your own eye before you correct the world around you?

RESPONSE IN ACTION

- ◆ Take some time this week to ponder the language that has crept into your daily speech. What other words can you begin to use to convey

¹ Roland J. Faley, *Footprints on the Mountain*, (Mahwah, NJ, Paulist Press, 1994). Pp. 190-191.

your thoughts and feelings? Make a list of new words or phrases and keep it handy as a reminder as you form new habits of speech.

- ◆ To help improve your ability to communicate, read **Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most** by Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton and Sheila Heen (Viking, 1999).
- ◆ The next time you see a television program that you find offensive, make your opinion known to the local station and the network that aired it or to the company that is advertising its product. Check your television guide for local station contact information.

SENDING FORTH AND CLOSING PRAYER

(The facilitator invites the group to a few moments of silence. Members pray in two alternate groups.)

- I. Father, reveal to each of us the times when we hold tenaciously to our understanding of a concept and fail to see another's point of view.
 - II. Open to us new ways of communicating – teach us how to affirm with a smile or nod, to console with a gentle touch, to be honest with ourselves and others, and yes, to confront with a soft tone.
 - I. Teach us how to be sensitive to levels of meaning and how to listen for others' feelings.
 - II. Teach us how to use the ideas which come from within each member of this small Christian community.
- All: Father, we thank you for being with us during this time together. We ask you to be with us as we go about your work in the week ahead. May our language reflect our love for you, and for all of your creation. We ask this in the name of your son, Jesus. Amen.

Author Unknown

(Members exchange a sign of peace.)