

EIGHTH SUNDAY OF YEAR C

Jesus often uses vivid language and exaggerations to help get his message across: *'Hypocrite! Take the plank out of your own eye first, and then you will see clearly enough to take the splinter that is in your brother's eye.'* It is so easy to judge others harshly and ourselves with much more understanding, making excuses for our own words and actions, while taking offence at things which hurt us.

The season of Lent begins this coming Wednesday, when we spend six weeks preparing for the great feast of Easter and the season of the Resurrection. It would be good to bring to prayer how we should each approach Lent, what to give up, and maybe what to take on. The readings today give us much food for thought.

Ecclesiasticus reminds us of the importance of our speech, and how it often reveals the deeper inner condition of our heart. We may be thinking of giving up chocolate as usual this Lent, but a better suggestion would be to continue eating chocolate while giving up gossip and all negative speech. On this subject, St. James has the following to say in his epistle: *'Among all the parts of the body, the tongue is a whole wicked world: it infects the whole body; catching fire itself from hell, it sets fire to the whole wheel of creation.'*¹ So reviewing our speech and how we speak to, or about, others would be a very good place to start when it comes to considering what to fast from.

Taking Jesus' words in the gospel, maybe this Lent could be an opportunity to fast from judging and condemning others. As I touched on last week, we simply do not know what is going on in people's lives and what they are having to deal with at any given moment. Could we seek to be more understanding and compassionate?

Looking at the same question from a different perspective, are we far too harsh on ourselves, always criticizing and judging what we do and say, rather than imitating Jesus in his love for us. One of the great commandments is to *'love your neighbour as yourself.'*² If we do not treat ourselves with understanding and compassion, how then can we begin to treat others in that way?

Key to our spiritual life is the need to forgive. Do we need to ask God's help to forgive someone? There is no one in heaven carrying unforgiveness. While forgiveness is a process, the first step is to make an act of the will to want to forgive, or even to ask God for the grace to want to forgive. Maybe this could be the most significant thing that we can seek to work on this coming Lent.

So as we prepare for Ash Wednesday and the Lenten Season, let us pray and consider the big things that we really need to fast from, those sins and vices that hold us back but which we seem to give into so easily. Yes, giving up luxuries is good, but do not neglect what Jesus might refer to as the 'weightier matters' when it comes to the disposition of our hearts.³

God bless,

Fr Andy

¹ James 3:6.

² Matthew 22:39.

³ Cf. Matthew 23:23.