

# **Archbishop Lori's Homily: 8th Sunday in Ordinary Time; St. Vincent de Paul Parish, Wheeling, WV**

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*Wheeling, WV*

*Mar. 2, 2019*

## **Introduction**

Let me begin with a word of greeting to those of you gathered here this evening at St. Vincent Parish and to those of you who are watching this Mass on television or on-line. I am very grateful for your constancy and prayers throughout this time of transition, as we await the appointment of a new bishop for the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston. It is my hope and prayer that this entire process will move ahead quickly, that I will be able to provide you more information and clarity as it does so. Above all, I join you in praying that you will receive a wonderful new bishop who will give you and the entire diocese a shepherd's care, after the mind and heart of Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

While I am here at St. Vincent's, I would like to offer a word of special thanks to your good pastor, Monsignor Paul Hudock. Monsignor, thank you so much for your devoted pastoral care, for all that you are doing to make St. Vincent's a vibrant parish, a parish that has taken the Gospel to heart and a parish that is bold in sharing the Gospel with others. Let's express our warmest thanks to Monsignor Paul.

This evening I also want to welcome and thank the leadership, staff, supporters, and volunteers who enable Catholic Charities of Wheeling-Charleston to do such amazing work in serving poor and vulnerable throughout the State of West Virginia. Tonight

is the annual Catholic Charities Gala, a further opportunity to celebrate and support this ministry that provides for many a lifeline and an affirmation of their human dignity.

Finally, I want to thank the Knights of Columbus 4th Degree who are with us this evening. I've served as Supreme Chaplain of the Knights for many years and I greatly admire the work of my brother Knights. Warmest thanks!

## **The Age of Outrage**

And now, dear friends, a reflection on the Gospel just proclaimed. Whether we like it or not, we live in a digital universe. Even those of us who are not on Twitter, Instagram, or Facebook cannot ignore the pervasive influence of social media in our lives and upon our culture. Like everything else, though, social media has an upside and downside.

Social media makes it possible for us to communicate with others as never before. It's not only a way to share information and messages, but also a way in which people can interact with one another. Indeed, for many, social media is the principal way they interact with others. It can be used to strengthen friendships, to link people together, and as a way of sharing with one another the Gospel and the Church's teaching. As we know, however, there are dangers in social media, including on-line bullying and other forms of destructive interaction.

Social media is also a venue where people unleash their anger. Thinking themselves anonymous, people judge others rashly and harshly, sometimes consigning them to the lowest regions of the netherworld. When a controversy erupts, a free-for-all breaks out in the blogosphere. Many people feel they need to weigh in – no matter how ill-informed they might be. They judge not only the actions of others but also their character and motives. It can happen to any of us almost at a moment's notice. With these interactive tools of communication at our disposal, we can be tempted to vent our spleen when someone or something gets under our skin. At other times we may find ourselves rashly judged by others in this public forum.

I'm not a sociologist nor still less an expert in social media, but I'm going to wager that this boiling cauldron of anger just below the surface has helped to create an

angry, judgmental culture; we live in an age of outrage. We see this, for example, in the extremely divisive political discourse now in vogue. We often see anger and cynicism in the news and entertainment industries. And sometimes this judgmental attitude spills over into our day-to-day relationships, with family members, friends, and colleagues, and spoils those relationships.

## **The Beam and the Splinter**

Jesus preached the Gospel long before social media came on the scene. He didn't have to navigate in a digital world but one thing he did have to do: he had to deal with human nature, with human nature damaged by sin. In the Gospel of John we read that Jesus "did not need anyone to testify about human nature; he himself understood it well" (2:25). In today's Gospel reading from St. Luke, Jesus displays how deeply he understands us when he challenges our very human tendency to judge others harshly, even unjustly without taking any account of our own weaknesses and failings. He asks us: "Why do you notice the splinter in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own eye?"

In other words, how can we judge and correct others for their minor faults when we ourselves are guilty of greater and more serious sins? Before you and I get on our high horse and go after others, Jesus warns us, that we had better stop and first examine our own lives – not only our outward actions but also what lies in the depths of our hearts. When we fail to take this all-important step, we risk becoming hypocrites, that is, people who seek to appear holy, righteous, and upstanding but who are deep down unjust and impure in the sight of God.

## **Seeing Clearly in Christ**

What, then, is the Lord saying to us? Surely he can't mean that we are unable to make judgments and correct one another! Every day we have to make judgments and often we do have to correct others, whether at home, at school, or at work. So, the Lord is not asking us to go through life as timid people afraid to speak up in the face of wrongdoing and injustice, just because we ourselves are not perfect. Nor is the Lord ruling out what our Catholic Tradition calls "fraternal correction". No, that is not how we should read or understand this Gospel.

What we should take away from it is this: The Lord is inviting us to be his disciples. In spite of our sins and imperfections, the Lord invites us to root our lives in him through prayer, spiritual reading, studying the faith, penance, silence, and the frequent reception of the Sacraments, most especially Eucharist & Reconciliation. In all of these ways the Lord who is our Master invites us to become like him, to be those good trees that bear good fruit because we are rooted in him. When we have a vibrant relationship of love with the Lord Jesus – when we are active, loving members of his Body, the Church, and when we truly share in his victory over sin and death, we come to know ourselves, we begin to see ourselves as the Lord see us, as we grow conscious of those things that really need to change in our lives. Trusting in the Lord's mercy, we find forgiveness, strength, humility and wisdom. Once that begins to happen, we grow in our ability to speak the truth in charity. We'll say what needs to be said – not in a self-righteous, angry, or judgmental way but in a way that seeks the good of the other person as well as our own.

Next Wednesday is Ash Wednesday, the beginning of the Lenten season. It is a season of repentance, a time to turn our lives around, a time to open our hearts more widely to Christ, a time to become more like Christ. In an era when angry words and harsh judgments are swirling about us, we might want to consider prayerfully how we think and speak of others, and how we interact with them, whether in person or on-line. How quick are we to judge others? How quick are we to speak in anger? Among the things we might want to give up for Lent is anger and rash judgment. Among the graces we might want to seek is to root ourselves more deeply in Christ so that, like Jesus, we will speak and do the truth in love. May God bless us and give us the grace of a holy, life-changing Lenten Season.