

[Sirach 27:4-7; Psalm 92; 1 Cor. 15:54-58; Luke 6:39-45]

I think I am here long enough for most of you to know that I have a sense of humor. Some would call it “creative” and others might call it “bizarre.”

When I hear the Gospel story about the plank and the splinter, I remember a very creative teacher in a parish where I was assigned as Associate Pastor in a parish with a school. The teacher told the children to be creative and to return the next day with props explaining any Gospel parable they would choose. The next day, during Religion Class, one of the clever students stood up with a baseball cap that had been taped to a long, skinny, empty cardboard box with at least a half a roll of duct tape. He went from student to student saying, “You’ve got a splinter in your eye...”

When I hear the words of St. Paul from our Second Reading, I remember that I didn’t hear them first in Church. I actually heard those words for the first time while watching an old W. C. Fields movie. He was a comic star from the 1930’s and 40’s with a distinctive appearance and a tall hat. He spoke out of the side of his mouth with a distinctive voice. The movie scene was at their home. They were sitting around the table having breakfast. W. C. was at one end of the table, his wife was at the other, and sitting alongside were a teenage daughter and a young son, and W. C.’s mother-in-law. She scowled at him and asked, “Isn’t it a bit early to be drinking alcohol?” He sneers at her and says under his breath, “Shut up you old nag.” Then the mother-in-law raises her finger in the air and says, “One day you are going to drown in a vat of whiskey!” “Drown in a vat of whiskey,” repeats Fields. Then, he says, “Oh, Death, where is thy sting?”

Abraham Lincoln said it a little differently than the wise man who composed our First Reading, but it’s the same idea. Lincoln said: “It is better to remain silent and be thought a fool, than to speak up and remove all doubt.” Since the time of ancient Egypt, many have agreed that, compared with most speech, “silence is golden.” And silence earns its glorious reputation because we often use language so badly.

Sometimes we lie; sometimes we just bend the facts a little. We say what we don't know, yet assert it as fact. We speak impulsively and cause irreparable harm. We chatter aimlessly, suffocating our listeners with our prattle. We gossip and ruin reputations. We voice opinions, some of which may reveal how dark our hearts really are. "From the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks!"

Before any election, we scrutinize the candidates to hear how their words confirm or betray their character. Of course when we talk, we give ourselves away too, despite our best intentions. That's why there's a law that says, "You have the right to remain silent." We might want to exercise that right more often!

The words we speak not only reveal us; they also have a way of deepening who we are. This shouldn't surprise us, as we confess our faith in an incarnate God, a Word made Flesh. God takes on flesh, and becomes all the things that flesh is: fragile, hungry, in need of friendship, capable of bleeding and dying. But in Jesus, flesh also becomes all the things the Divine Word is: life-giving, truth-telling, soul-healing. Not to mention, stronger than death and even stronger and more powerful than Hell itself.

All of this might make us more mindful of the words we choose. When you and I speak bitterly as a matter of habit, we harden into cynics. When we think violent thoughts, it's only a matter of time before we indulge in violent actions.

Remember the story of *My Fair Lady*? In a class-conscious society, this girl in London who speaks with a low-class Cockney dialect is not considered a "lady" at the start of the story. But as she learns to overcome her dialect, the power of new upper-class speech transforms her. A new identity blooms in her, and she becomes one with it.

Words take on flesh -- and flesh, words. God's Word of Love becomes the Baby of Bethlehem. The stories Jesus tells of forgiveness become the Man on the Cross in Jerusalem. Words become flesh as surely as a tree produces its fruit -- good or rotten -- with integrity to its inner nature. If we intend gentleness, we must use softer words. If we're not yet ready within to produce loving speech

And now, for some upcoming events. On Tuesday, we will be wonderfully schizophrenic. It is Paczki Day, and the members of the Active Christian

Women's Club are providing one free paczek and many more paczki for a free-will offering. Later that evening, we will have a Family Mass for our families in our Faith Formation program and for everyone in our parish family. Mass will be at 6:00 PM, followed by a simple soup and bread meal in the parish center. This dinner is sponsored by our local Knights of Columbus Council and our Ushers.

This Wednesday, we begin another season of Lent. In order to promote silent prayer during this season, we will have silent time just before the start of Mass. We liturgical ministers will be in our places in the sanctuary. Mass will begin with the welcome read by the Lector. There will be no entrance procession or opening hymn. We will simply begin with the Sign of the Cross and go right into the Penitential Rite.

Come join us on Monday nights for Sung Evening Prayer. It transports me into another world. A world of praise and worship, a world of reflection and prayer. If you haven't experienced Sung Evening Prayer, please join us, beginning on Monday, March 11th. It will deepen and enhance your prayer life.

Are you free during the day? We will pray the Stations of the Cross on Fridays at 3:00 PM, the Hour of Divine Mercy. Did you know we have evening Mass on Wednesdays at 7:00 PM? This is followed by Confessions at 7:45 PM. We also have Confessions on Saturdays at 3:00 PM. All of these opportunities for grace can be found in our parish bulletin and on our website. Also, go to the FORMED website for full length articles, movies and other video presentations.

After Mass today, I invite everyone to take home with you a pamphlet explaining Lent and giving you some helpful hints how to make this Lent a time of prayer, thanksgiving, stewardship and spiritual growth.

Last year's Advent resulted in a radically missionary Christmas. You and I have the power to make this Lent the best Lent ever! And, at the end, for all of us, a radically missionary Easter! AMEN!