

Lk6:43-49) Here's morality in a nutshell: "A good tree," says our Lord, "does not bear rotten fruit, nor does a rotten tree bear good fruit. For every tree is known by its fruit." Our Lord first applies this teaching to our speech, saying: "From the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks." In other words, the secret state of our heart can be revealed by our words. Are they unassuming or egotistical? Do they spread peace or discord? Do they encourage or discourage our neighbor? Do they bolster or undermine his reputation? Lest we think that words are the infallible sign of our inner state, Jesus then asks, "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord' but do not do what I command?" Words, then, can also be deceptive – even self-deceptive! Deeds, however, speak louder than words. Many recite the Creed, but fewer conceive a real hatred toward sin; fewer still take the second step by abandoning themselves to a life of virtue manifested in good deeds. Yet, even good deeds aren't a completely foolproof sign.

Our Lord ends His brief expose by comparing His true disciple to someone who builds his house on rock. Unlike the house built on shifting sand, the house founded on rock survives. The storm in turn, which tests it, represents a full-fledged persecution. For steadfastness in mortal peril is the only truly infallible sign of the secret state of our heart. Such perseverance is only given consistently to faithful friends of the cross like Saints Cornelius and Cyprian, whom we celebrate today. Those who befriend Christ's cross take the third and final step in the spiritual life. Contrast this gospel teaching on morality with the doctrine of Gnosticism – a fundamentally pagan world view with a Christian veneer. In the following quotation, St. Irenaeus explains gnostic morality in a nutshell: "As gold sunk in filth does not lose its beauty but preserves its own nature, the filth being unable to harm the gold, so they say of themselves that even if they be immersed in material deeds, nothing will injure them nor will they lose their spiritual essence. Therefore, 'the most perfect' among them do without fear all the forbidden things of which Scripture tells us that 'they who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.'" (Adv. Haer. 1.6.2-3)

A good tree doesn't bear rotten fruit nor does a rotten tree bear good fruit. Every tree must be like its fruit. This gospel truth has another startling application. If Jesus is the fruit precious beyond all telling, then His mother, Mary, is the tree. All Christians agree that in His human nature Jesus is immaculate and full of grace. What's more, we all believe that even during His earthly life, our Lord was impeccable. In other words, He was not only sinless; He was also incapable of sin. We Catholics go further than our separated brethren in Christ. We affirm that the tree is precious like its fruit. Mary was also immaculate. She too was impeccable – with this difference: Jesus couldn't sin by nature whereas Mother Mary couldn't sin by grace.

Like all analogies, this one of the tree and its fruit also falls short. Because once the fruit falls from the tree, it begins a life of its own independent of the tree. But when a mother gives birth to her child, her mothering role has just begun. Let's not forget, however, that before a mother gives birth, she first conceives her child in secret. Mother Mary also works secretly to bring future converts to the waters of baptism, where she mysteriously gives them birth. Then she nurtures baptized Catholics throughout life to adulthood in Christ. In this way, Mother Mary is the exemplar of the Common Priesthood of the Faithful. Jesus in turn is the exemplar of the Ministerial Priesthood. Although essentially different from one another, these two priesthoods complement each other; even as Jesus is the new Adam, while Mary is the new Eve. It follows, therefore, that the laity must participate in Mary's motherhood as the legitimate exercise of their Common Priesthood of the Faithful. One way they do this is by assisting bishops and priests in their ministry. For this reason, the Legion Handbook aptly points out that the Christian without an apostolate is like Mary without motherhood. (See Chapter 6.3) Legionaries mustn't be guilty of this contradiction in terms! Mary, Mother of the Church! Pray for us! Amen!