

## St Pius & St Anthony Homily 8<sup>th</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time Year C (2024)

There was a great old movie called “If You Could See What I Hear” (*Marc Singer-also acted in 1982 movie BeastMaster*). He was a blind musician, Tom Sullivan, who wonderfully overcomes his handicap of blindness. He was an excellent musician, a pianist-singer (up there with the likes of Stevie Wonder). He wished to keep up with friends, as normally as possible, going along, doing all that they did too. He had good friends around to help him, and one named Will, who would go jogging with him, (*though Will, only rode a bike, but he called out warning alerts for Tom running, on what obstacles to avoid in his run path*) In one humorous scene, they had been on a picnic, and his friends had all had two or three too many drinks, and so they made him designated driver. As they drove along the road, it was an isolated country road, they called out directions (like Instrument flying in a plane?): “A little to the left”, “Back to the right about 2 o’clock”, “Come on, feel the road” Of course they would try to explain to the officer, that he was the safest one to drive! But perhaps like today’s gospel, the drink-blind there were leading the real blind?

Or, the other day during that snow, I was giving someone a ride, and he says to me, “How are you driving, this windshield is terrible? The road spray of salt resin had sprayed on it over and over as trucks passed, and my washer fluid line must have been frozen at the tip (or am I out?). So between the white frost cover and when sun hit, it made a good white filter laying over the windshield. But I told him, we were okay, I had a good angle view of everything, lines at road’s side etc?”

Or another example, similar to Jesus’ point in the gospel comes from when I was a kid in our neighborhood, somehow my mom became the community ‘nurse’ to get splinters out of the neighbor kids’ hands/fingers. I knew what that operation felt like-I had been there a lot myself. But so many kids would pull this move where they started fidgeting, or crying, saying ‘stop stop stop’, and mom would have to assure them, “I’m just washing your finger first, I don’t even have the needle out yet...” One kid from across the street once innocently asked, as they sat at the table, “Patty, you do have your contacts in, don’t you?”

Is this what Jesus is talking about, when it comes to helping someone get a splinter out from their eye? If I have a wooden **beam** in my own, that’s no help! I need to see clearly first myself, if I am going to help another see clearly, or at all. If someone is digging into your skin, you want them to have eyesight, good & clear. If I claim to show you what is right, and what wrong with you, I better have the best, right view, the fullest, clearest capture of the horizon myself first!

Another way of saying this is, that before presuming to tell someone else what is right and what is wrong, I better have been there myself – better know what it is to stand where they are or go through what they are going through. Interesting about Jesus teaching this need to remove a wooden beam from one’s

own eye, before presuming to help take a splinter out from a neighbor's eye, is that I suspect Jesus is speaking from experience. More than a random, simple parable, we know Jesus grew up around carpentry, and many a day could be found alongside St Joseph—they are both carpenters-woodworkers (Mk 6:3, Mt 13:55)! Maybe some experience like this lies behind this teaching: St Joseph is sawing up a storm and flying sawdust stirred up in the shop, gets into Jesus' eye and fighting off the lubricating tears and frequent winks, he loses focus or sight of the project job on the table right in front of him (or he looks across the bench and feels like Joseph, is way off on some cuts or the wood finish is much too rough still?-he knows the sawdust distorts any constructive critique he may be tempted to offer. I also hear in his dramatic differential between a mere splinter and a beam, that he has been there (anything lodged in eye between eyelid and pupil is huge!). I don't know if it has happened to you or not, but even the slightest sawdust (or even dirt-dust) so badly irritates a person's sensitive eye tissue. I know even a slight speck of sawdust, feels like a 2x4 jammed into one's eye. Jesus knows! He has been there how many times in Joseph's woodshop!

So, Jesus' point is that before we rashly judge and pick out the sins of another person, we better ensure first that our eyesight (vision) is clear and unobstructed (good). The greatest obstruction or distortion to our view and assessment of sin, is our own sin. What do they say, but that we are most sensitive to and quick to jump on in others, what we ourselves are suffering from (*kids used to say this tauntingly, "It takes one to know one" as a comeback when someone cruelly pointed out their fault or weakness!*) Well, Jesus is simply warning us to be careful about jumping, judging a brother or sister before having done our own necessary house-keeping, our own purifying repentance, a thorough lookover-self examination first, and an honest admission and claim of our sins.

Doesn't human nature in us, tend to project off our own evil **on to** others ('It's not me, not my fault, its them and theirs!') Psychologists call such efforts to cast our own blame on to other people, ego-defense mechanisms, that occur when we falsely deny any responsibility for bad behavior (*first the ego, straight out denies it, and then if ever the ego is self-strong enough to claim any connection, it becomes 'They made me'*). Projection (or assigning my evil to others) is so commonly seen in the practice of 'scapegoating' ('it's **them, they** are the problem!') Don't we see this so much – it is the whole rest of the world's fault – never mine? Carl Jung calls this denial/projection of evil on to others, our failure to integrate our shadow – it holds back our healthy individuation and self-actualization. In Jesus' religious terms, it is a failure to 'deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him' (**which means claim our own sin/accept responsibility & do fitting penance**), Matt 16:24) and it is a rejection of Jesus' kingdom-living of truly loving God, Neighbor and Self (no - ego).

Thomas Merton (*a fellow Kentuckian once living in monastery over by Bardstown*) who perceived this immature ego-projection in his own years of spiritual work on himself and among the many novices he guided. In an essay from his book “New Seeds of Contemplation”, he writes about it: *“One of the first things to learn if you want to be a contemplative, is how to mind your own business. Nothing is more suspicious in a man who seems holy, than an impatient desire to reform ‘other’ men.”* (p. 255 ‘Renunciation’ from NSC)

If we are to judge others correctly, then we need to see clearly ourselves. If we claim to know right, then we better be right ourselves. This correction, this improvement that we seek starts with ourselves. The sin needing correction first is my own!

(My own beam, not my brother’s splinter!)

**Note:** Merton is right in line here, with French philosopher Blaise Pascal from his book ‘Pensees’ (329) who wrote that “Man is neither angel nor beast; but the tragedy is that he who would act the angel, ends up acting the beast” (sin of zealotry/ extremism) Merton writes further in the same article quoted above, “To avoid sin and practice virtue is not to be a saint yet: it is only to be a man, a human being. ....before you can become a saint, you have to be human.....” (p. 255 ‘Renunciation’ from NSC)