

Forming Our Hearts and Minds

Sir. 27: 4-7; Ps. 92; 1 Cor. 15: 54-58; Lk. 6: 39-45

The Gospel for this Sunday is the third instalment of a sermon that Jesus delivered to His disciples. This sermon is often called the Sermon on the Plain as opposed to the Sermon on the Mount that we encounter in the Gospel of Matthew because Jesus stood 'on a level place' when He spoke to His disciples.

Just as a master reveals his secrets to his students, Jesus taught His disciples the key aspects of His way of life. First, He taught them not to become obsessed with the pursuit of wealth, position, and the good life because, even if you are lacking in these things now, you will be rewarded with plenty in the life to come. Then He taught them to detach themselves from material things and to love their enemies by giving freely to them. This Sunday, Jesus teaches His disciples not to judge others or to criticize them lest they fail to see the even greater faults in themselves.

Jesus told His disciples all of these things so that they would be prepared to be spiritual guides and teachers of His way of life to others. Jesus knew that He would be departing from the world and that He would be relying on His disciples to teach future generations of faithful disciples. He knew that if He did not form their hearts and minds by teaching them His way of life, they would be like the blind leading the blind. He wanted them to be fully prepared to be spiritual guides and teachers of His way to future disciples and not to lead them astray.

In the First Reading for this Sunday, from the Book of Sirach, the sage tells us that just as the fruit discloses the cultivation of a tree, our words reveal the cultivation of our mind. He goes on to say that we should not form our opinion about a person until we have heard him speak because his words will be the true test of what is hidden in his mind. Jesus was fully aware of this wisdom. Therefore, He wanted to install 'His way' in the hearts and minds of His disciples so that everything they said and did would reveal His teachings to anyone who witnessed their actions and preaching.

And this is the message for all of us, if we want to count ourselves among the followers of Christ. We should be forming our hearts and minds by reading His teachings in the Gospels, by reading documents published by the Church, by pondering the words of the saints; especially the Doctors of the Church, and through prayer.

For most of us, these exercises may seem to be impossible to carry out given the busy-ness of our lives. But the key word to remember is 'form'. Forming our hearts and minds is a slow process. Just as a rock is formed by the action of wind and water over a long period of time, so our hearts and minds are formed slowly through reading and prayer done for even a short time every day.

Every time we approach the eucharistic table at Mass, we offer the greatest prayer possible as we encounter the body, blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ in the appearance of bread and wine. Let us ask Him to form our hearts and minds so that we may reveal His teachings in all our words and deeds. Let us pray that, in all we say and do, we may continue His mission, acting as good spiritual guides to others as we journey together with them towards our heavenly home.