

Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

March 2, 2025

Our Holy Father, Pope Francis continues to be at the hospital. We are told he remains critical but stable. Let's continue to pray for him.

Some years ago, early in his pontificate, Pope Francis made a simple statement that got a lot of attention. In fact he made MANY statements that got a lot of attention. He is the Pope after all. But one comment in particular really caught the attention of not just the faithful, but many others as well. He made it in response to a question from an Italian journalist who was conducting an interview for a magazine. When asked who he was, that is, asked to sort of describe himself, the Pope responded very simply and directly . .

“I am a sinner.”

And those who subsequently heard or read what the Pope had said were affected in many different ways. But the overwhelming reaction, at least from my perspective was not what you might have guessed. You see, it seemed to me that the most common reaction to those four simple words was a complete surprise.

Now, of course, that wasn't the reaction of everyone. And I was certainly not surprised at all. But many were. Many people were sort of stunned by what he said. And not because they disagreed with what he said. That wasn't it at all. It was the fact that he actually thought it, said it, and as far as anyone could tell - meant it. And people found that to be very refreshing. So unexpected. Something they couldn't really remember any pope saying before. (Although of course, some certainly had, or had said something very similar.) And the fact that it was the first thing he mentioned when asked the question gave it even more weight.

And people were filled with surprise. Complete surprise. I was really glad that he said it, and really “proud” of him in that moment. At some level,

when the Pope speaks, he is speaking for all of us, showing the face of the Catholic faithful to the world. And he got it just right in that moment. He really did. Yet, the reaction of surprise by many Catholics and non-Catholics alike, got me wondering about something related to what he said.

You see, in all honesty, it made me a little sad and disappointed that, for many people, this was an odd sort of occurrence. They didn't see this often, if ever. People and particularly people in high-places simply didn't talk that way. They really weren't used to people, and in this particular case, a person of faith being so humble. So vulnerable. So honest and so transparent.

What a shame. Seriously. What a shame. Is true humility really that rare in our society? Is it rare in our Church leaders? Is it rare in our workplaces and homes and schools? Is it rare in this holy place, in this very church, in these pews? Put simply, is it rare in you and in me?

**“Why do you notice the splinter in your
brother’s eye, but do not perceive
the wooden beam in your own?”**

So says Jesus to his disciples in today's Gospel passage from St. Luke. The image he paints is truly a powerful one particularly in the way he uses a “splinter” to represent the fault of someone else, while choosing to use a “wooden beam” to represent the fault of the one doing the judging. And what also makes these words powerful is the fact that many of us, if we take an honest look within, can see ourselves in the very people Jesus is admonishing. So many of us do the very thing Jesus has a serious problem with. We put people down. We criticize. We point out their faults. We gossip. We judge. It's as if we are saying that other people are the problem, other people are what's wrong with this world. If only other people could see how far they fall short, see what they need to change.

If only other people . . .

And that's where we can really learn from our ailing Pope Francis. You see, none of what we say we believe in faith makes sense if we don't feel our own personal need to change, our own personal need to be healed, to be guided, to be comforted, to be forgiven, to be saved. That's where faith begins, in the realization that we are broken, wounded, we don't have all the answers, and can't make it through this life on our own. We need God. And we need each other. Not in some "general" sense, but in a very real, concrete way, a God who wants nothing more than to help us be more and love more.

My dear friends in Christ, I believe that to change the world, we first have to change ourselves. Or to state it more correctly, we need to allow our God to change us from within. And that starts with admitting with complete sincerity that we need God desperately not just to start things in motion, not just to plop us down on this earth, but to sustain us and guide us and forgive and make us whole - day after day after day.

My dear friends, there is a lot that is wrong with this world, a lot that is broken. And each of us contributes to the world not being the beautiful place God created it to be, not in small ways, not in tiny "splinters" that don't matter much. Rather, in big ways, as men and women who make choices which sometimes harm people, harm relationships, and many things around us. May each of us truly want a better world, and not simply look to others to make it happen. But instead, let's take that critical first step and admit, "I am a sinner."

A Short Story

Late Bishop Potter of New York was sailing to Europe. As he went aboard the large ocean liner, he found that another passenger was to share the cabin with him. After looking at his quarters, he went back to the purser's desk and asked if he could leave his gold watch and other valuables on the ship's safe. He explained that ordinarily he never did this sort of thing but he had been to his cabin and had met the man who would occupy the other bed and judging from his appearance, he was afraid that he might

not be a very trustworthy person. The purser accepted the responsibility of caring for valuables and remarked, "It's alright bishop. I'll be very glad to take care of them for you. The other guy has just been up here and deposited all his valuables for the same reason."