

HYPOCRITES!
8th Sunday in OT, February 27, 2022
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Once a fox was roaming the forest searching for food. As to his bad luck, he got caught up in a trap. He tried his best to get free but lost his tail in the struggle. He felt very small, thinking that now, every fox would laugh at him. He felt so sad that he thought of committing suicide. But then he said to himself, "It is cowardice to kill oneself. I should think of something else."

At last, the fox planned to persuade all the other foxes to part with their tails. So, he called a meeting of all the foxes and said, "We should get rid of our tails as they are heavy, ugly and tiresome."

Though he tried to divert the attention of all the foxes from his tail-less appearance, one clever fox noticed it and said, "Sir! You wouldn't have given us this advice if you weren't tail-less. Would you?"

And so, we say, "Hypocrisy seldom works."

Too many, this is a well-known, classic children's story is meant to illustrate hypocrisy. And hypocrisy goes to the crux of our Gospel today... Jesus really, really dislikes hypocrites.

Our Liturgy of the Word opens with a reading from Sirach. Sirach was a Jewish scribe who lived in Jerusalem and authored his Canon in Alexandria, Egypt, between 180–175 BC. His words align with those of St. Luke. Sirach tells us that our faults appear when we speak just as a potter's talent is shown in the kiln... is there a trapped air bubble in the clay that will cause the pottery to explode when heated? He goes on to explain that a tree bears fruit according to the care it has been given. And, finally, he offers us this delightful piece of advice: "Praise no one before he speaks."

Jesus picks up where Sirach left off offering us three, small parables dealing with hypocrites and hypocrisy. They are vivid stories, easy to understand and to visualize. We have a blind person leading a blind person and both fall into a pit. We have a person with a wooden beam in his eye noticing a splinter in another's eye... he sees the other's

small issue but cannot see his own huge issue. And, like Sirach, Jesus tells us a tree is known by its fruit... just a person is known by their words and actions... do those words and actions come from a good heart or do they come from a dark and evil place? Are we fooled by the prettiness on the outside hiding the ugliness inside?

Over and over again, Jesus lambasted the Pharisees, Sadducees and the scribes for being hypocrites. And, sadly, most of us, me included, have been hypocrites a time or two, or more. Often times, we commit this sin without knowing it or we simply ignore it. It seems easy for us to point out another's faults, missteps or bad decisions without looking inward, knowing that we've done the very same thing. Christian author Joshua Infantado points us to some signs of hypocrites so that we, as Jesus tells us, we can remove the beam from our eye first so that we can help our brother or sister remove their splinter.

Number 1: Hypocrites pretend to be someone they are not. A hypocrite uses a mask to hide his true identity and be perceived by others in a way he's not. One only need to look at today's political

spectrum as an example... in the modern vernacular we call these people “flip-floppers” or “two-faced.” Sadly, those that stand by their convictions and public statements are rare... and we actually find a need to applaud those that stick to their beliefs.

Number 2: Hypocrites love praise. St. Matthew (6:1-2) tells us when you do a charitable act do not sound a trumpet. Jesus (Matthew 6:5) says when we pray do not do it on a street corner as to be seen by others. Number 2 here can be really hard for us. Many of us respond to praise and once we get a taste of a good friend or respected leader telling us that we did something well, we want more. We have to try to do good for the sake of good... for example, giving a gift and *really*, truly giving it without the expectation of thanks, favor or even a return gift. When we do something for another, is it out of pure goodness or is there an ulterior motive?

Number 3: Good ole’ number three is allot of us... being more concerned about correcting others than ourselves. This is the adage “practice what you preach” or “walk the talk.” Usually in the form of

gossip, it's so easy for us to cast judgement... "I can't believe so-and-so did such-and-such. They should have done this-or-that" all the while ignoring that we done the very same thing a time or two, and have probably been judged by the person we're judging.

Number 4: A hypocrite's heart is distant from God. This person has mastered the art of lip-service, to fake it, to phone it in. On the surface they are a good person... do the right things... say the right words. Even today, we can attend this Mass, sing hymns and give praise to God but if we leave it at the door on the way out, we are hypocrites. If we are not right with God, then all of this, it is nothing more than obligation.

And, Number 5: Hypocrites are self-righteous. Look at me... follow me... I am doing everything the right way... and, it is true, the person may be doing their family, community and church the right way but it's all for show, it's fake, a façade... the inside is empty.

Now, hopefully, you haven't tuned me out yet because I don't intend for today's message to be hopeless nor a stereotypical Catholic

guilt trip. Jesus did not like hypocrites for two reasons... the first because the person is pretending to be someone they are not... Jesus wants us, needs us, to be true to ourselves, blemishes, warts and all. But probably, more importantly, Jesus wants us to be true so that we can help others be true. Nothing disappointed and infuriated Jesus more than church leaders, then and now, to lead the people, his sheep, astray. Due to hypocrisy within the Church both from clergy and parishioners many a believer and unbeliever have been totally turned off to Christianity. Hypocrisy is among the greatest of evils.

This sin is a huge struggle for many of us. However, this sin, like others, can be overcome. Granted, it probably won't evaporate overnight but just knowing, recognizing and admitting that there is a personal struggle against hypocrisy is an enormous step forward. God can see into our hearts and he will commend you for your efforts. He is waiting to help us overcome this falseness... just pray and ask for his help. We will then be on the road towards living a genuine, blessed and

true life aiming, aiming, mind you, for the standard of perfection that
Jesus desires for all of us, the people of God.