

IV TRINITY 2016

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

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ROMANS 8.18 ST. LUKE 6.36



“Can’t see the forest for the trees” seems like a good title for today’s Gospel. Trees are nice...too many of them get in the way of seeing things clearly and keep us from finding our way out of the forest.

Father Massey Shepherd, author of the *Oxford American Prayer Book Commentary*, writes today’s Gospel was originally intended as an Embertide lesson...to advise priests about their attitudes toward those committed to their charge. However, the Gospel applies to all of us...and if we get a little uncomfortable in what it says...then we are getting the point.

The Gospel is ultimately about God’s mercy and judgment. God likes being merciful...and he expects us to show the same kind of mercy toward others. We fall short of showing mercy when we are overly critical and judgmental of another person...whether our judgment is accurate or not.

All too often we find fault in others. We don’t like what they are doing...and we can be especially harsh of their faults when we ignore in ourselves the very same faults. We’re expected to help people reclaim order in their lives...but we have to first reclaim order in our own lives. Otherwise none of us can see the forest for the trees.

The short stories Jesus tells about a blind person leading the blind, and trying to remove the speck of dust from someone’s eye when we have an entire forest of trees in our own eyes...make the same point. We must first dispense with obstacles clouding our vision and get our lives in order before we are in a position to help someone else.

Jesus tells us not to judge and not to condemn others. We need to be careful not to misunderstand what he is saying. We may judge a person’s actions...we may not be judgmental or petty in finding faults. We may condemn a person’s actions...we may not condemn the person. When we impose our own rigid and self-righteous standards on others and exempt ourselves...we can expect God to impose the same standards on us...and nothing less.

If we are looking for the measure...the standard...that governs our behavior...we can find it printed in several places in the *Book of Common Prayer*...the Ten Commandments is a good place to start...summarized at the beginning of every Mass to remind us what our hearts must be focused on...loving God above all else...loving others in the same way we want to be loved.

Christian love means acting for the good of others. We are supposed to help others overcome the obstacles in their lives...the unhealthy and destructive behavior that keeps them from experiencing God’s love to the fullest. We can’t help others unless we first take a look at our own lives. If we are engaged in unhealthy and destructive behavior ourselves...we must first stop that behavior...now!

And about those obstacles that get in our way...like the forest for the trees...Saint Paul tells us we can expect them...what he calls the “things that we suffer at this present time”. Obstacles can be physical...things that make us literally fall down...or they can be spiritual...things that cause us to lose our sight of God.

Saint Paul knew a lot about obstacles...they constantly got in his way...but he never lost hope...neither should we. He tells us that nothing we are going through now can compare with what awaits us in heaven...that which we by Faith hope for and have not yet seen. And we are to wait with patience and perseverance. Obstacles won’t last...heaven will.

Jesus also tells us to forgive others and God will forgive us. We are already forgiven for our faults...we are expected to forgive others...because that is the test of just how seriously we take God’s forgiveness. And both parties have to want to take part in forgiveness.

“Can’t see the forest for the trees”? It’s OK to take a walk in a forest full of trees. If the trees get in the way and we can’t see things clearly...we ask God for help in finding the way out. Only then can we help others.

