

FROM THE DESK OF **Fr. Julius**

Brothers and Sisters in Christ; Grace and Peace!



This last Sunday of February completes Ordinary Time as we prepare ourselves for Wednesday's distribution of Blessed ashes, and the genesis of Lent. Ash Wednesday is a day for prayer, fasting and abstinence. Although not a day of holy obligation, I strongly encourage each and every one to attend one of the Masses, or at least receive the ashes from any Catholic Church that may be near to you, as it indicates our willingness to fast, repent and pray. In our liturgy this week, Jesus challenges us to use our spoken words as he used his in his preaching and healing ministries -- to heal, to restore, and to bring back life, joy, and hope.

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in our short first reading, Ben Sirach, an early Jewish sage is discouraging on the way that words come from our mouths, and how they reveal our interior beliefs. Ben Sirach uses specific phrasing such as the *grain and husks* being separated in a farmer's sieve, as the quality of the *metal is revealed in the potter's fire*, and as the size and *quality of a tree's fruit* reveal the care it has received from the planter. In the Second Reading, St Paul assures the early Christian community that physical death does not destroy [*sting!*] who we are; we can rest assured that Christ has destroyed death forever. He advises the Corinthian Christians and us today to "*be firm, steadfast, always fully devoted to the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain,*" you are actively building up the Church.

In today's Gospel passage, resuming the Sermon on the Plain, Jesus echoes the teachings we heard in Ben Sirach. Again, with strong visual references such as the *blind leading the blind*, *the splinter in our neighbor's eye*, *the good tree bearing only good fruit*, our Lord is urging us to value honesty and uprightness in all our personal affairs with others. Are we not aware that there are times we miss the mark in our perception of others, even letting our own spiritual blindness rank another's? Why do we want to judge others when we have the same and sometimes greater faults as the one we are judging? No one, except God is good enough to judge others. "Jesus is not hiring!" Wisdom reminds us that silence can be golden, for God keeps us even from our *own* transgressions.

Jesus is inviting us to do a thorough introspection of ourselves, and to see when and how pride influences us. He wants us to change, so that we don't become blind guides who may lead others into a pit. Denying ourselves daily, looking for ways to give up even small comforts, joins our sufferings to our Lord, and answers the call to holiness.

"Let the mouth fast from foul words and unjust criticism, for what good is it if we abstain from birds and fishes, but bite and devour our brothers." -----St. John Chrysostom

Blessed Sunday!