

## Ordinary 8

### 3.2.25

The other day I tried logging into my bank account. When I did so, I found that the account wouldn't accept my password. I tried it again. Denied. I tried it a third time. Denied. Then I was informed that I would have to reset my password. The bank said it would send a temporary password to my email address in less than five minutes. Five minutes later, no new temporary password. Fifteen minutes later. No password. Thirty minutes later. No password.

Beyond irritated, I called the bank. The customer service agent on the other end of the phone was courteous and professional. I wanted to lash out at her and my stupid bank for blocking me from my own account. After all, I had used the same password for months. I also wanted to rant because they didn't send me a temporary password like they promised in five minutes or less.

The customer service agent must have been dealing with short-tempered idiots like me all day. She calmly and sincerely told me that a new, temporary password would be sent to my phone. Instantly, a link to my account appeared on my phone. She also said that sometimes those emails get sent to a spam folder. Did I check that? No, I sheepishly responded. And, when I looked in my spam folder, there was the email with my temporary password.

Feeling a bit better, I logged into my account. All was good. No maleficence, as I had originally imagined. No dark web attack on the account. In short order it dawned on me... I was using the wrong password all along. Sheesh!!!

My professional and courteous bank lady probably knew that since she saw my previous attempts to log in to that account, but the only thing she said was, "I'm glad I could help; have a nice day."

In my haste to log in to my account, I was quick to blame the difficulty on my stupid bank. I was quick to think that someone from the dark web had accessed my account and changed my password. All along, however, the only thing that was stupid...the only real problem was with...ME.

Jesus dives into that reality in today's gospel. He asks, "why are you so quick to judge others, so concerned with the speck in someone else's eye, when there is a huge plank in your own?" Jesus touches on a condition of his day and a condition that continues with gusto unimpeded in our current age: we are incredibly quick to judge what is wrong with everyone else. We are incredibly impatient when it comes to dealing with others' faults. Yet, at the same time, we are often negligent in examining our own conscience and slow to acknowledge our own faults and failings. We are even slower in making attempts to change those sinful habits or ways. And we are slower still in asking others to forgive us for our sins, for our arrogance, for our impatience.

In just a few days, we begin the season of Lent. Lent is all about experiencing a change of heart. That change of heart isn't something we work on for forty days and then forget about it – going back to our old ways right after Easter. The change we set out to experience in Lent is something that should last our whole life long. In light of today's gospel, perhaps one Lenten resolution we might work on is spending less time blaming others and pointing out THEIR faults. Instead, perhaps we can spend more time reflecting on what needs to be changed in US and actively work on changing those bad habits and ungodly behaviors.

A second theme that has been raised in the gospel by Jesus is this: what kind of fruit are we bearing? That is another good area to dwell on as we approach this upcoming Lenten Season.

During Lent, we often think about the things we'll avoid for the next 40 days. For example we might give up candy, soda, alcohol, cigarettes, or binge-watching. And then when Easter comes, it's back to embracing one or all of those things again with reckless abandon.

But, as I mentioned previously, Lent is about experiencing a change of heart. Inspired by today's gospel, perhaps we should reflect on how well or how poorly we reflect the image of Christ to others. We should ask: do people see me bearing the fruit of Christ by the way I speak and through the actions I perform? To that end, we need to ask: am I merciful, am I compassionate, am I trying to make our world better, am I trying to ease the suffering of others? There are concrete ways to do that within our parish community: assisting with our St. Vincent de Paul Society, helping with our home repair ministry, cooking for the residents of Pinellas Hope, participating in our justice ministry events with FAST – meeting with our elected officials to ensure that more affordable housing becomes available for the residents of our county. We are also meeting with them to work on keeping the water around our community clean.

My prayer for us, and what Jesus hopes for us in today's gospel, is to spend less time focusing on the faults of others and what needs to be changed in them. Instead, we need to use our time wisely by focusing on what we need to change in ourselves, with God's help and grace. Furthermore, we are to use our time to focus on how we can help others...how we can be Christ for others. Doing so is time well spent. And doing so is the way we can experience the Kingdom of God in the here and now...and in the life to come.

If you look at my pastor's column in this week's bulletin, I recalled an experience I had when I was in elementary school. Those many years ago, my second-grade teacher - Sr. Philip Neri - taught us that when you point a finger at someone else, three fingers are pointing back to you. She reminded me and my classmates that we are to take care of our own sins, our own faults first before we start looking at the sins and shortcomings of those around us.

Let us use this day and this approaching Season of Lent to take a good, a realistic, and a brutally honest look at ourselves. As we do so, may we clearly see the areas that need changing and pray for the grace to experience renewed hearts, minds, and spirits – so that we may reflect the life and light of Christ to others – both in the words we speak and in the actions we perform – today, tomorrow, and always.

Amen? Amen!