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As you recall, I'm sure, we've been reading the last two Sundays and today what in Luke's Gospel is called the "Sermon on the Plain" when Jesus spoke at length to his disciples about his teachings, his value system, what he expects of those who follow him. It's a part of the Gospel that we need to continue to reflect on regularly. In today's Gospel, Jesus is finishing up with a variety of instructions for us. But before we reflect at length on the Gospel (not necessarily at length, but for a short time), before we do that, I think it's important for us to notice that first lesson today.

We live in a time where we have what we call "social media" of every sort. We can communicate instantaneously across the globe with our Twitter, our email, our global phones — whatever — we're constantly putting words out there. If you remember that first lesson, or think about it briefly, the wise person who wrote that book of Ecclesiasticus tells us to be wary of what we say, be careful of our speech because it reveals who we really are.

I was somewhat surprised when I looked at the commentary that had been written close to 20 years ago, a commentary on these scripture lessons, written by Fr. John Castelot who used to be a scripture professor at St. John's Seminary. In his reflection on that first lesson, he tells us:

In today's reading Sirach deals with the use of the faculty of speech. He had learned even then (and this was thousands of years ago) that talk is cheap, and not only cheap, but also when misused is cheapening, hurtful. If the prevailing mood of society today is a deadening cynicism, it is because people have lied so often that they simply do not trust anyone. This is a frightening threat to human society. Without trust, interpersonal relationships at all levels, we're doomed. Sirach dwells on speech as a revelation of character. It shows up a person's faults as clearly as a sifting of grain exposes the worthless husks and the smelting of ore reveals the dross. Just as the fruit of a tree indicates clearly how well it has been tended, so does speech reveal a person's mind, how it has been developed. Praise no one before the person speaks, for it is then that we are tested.

We live in an age where we almost take for granted that we have fake news, as it's called. It's coming at us from every direction. We have people who propagate the idea that there is such a thing as an alternate truth. Your truth, well that doesn't

make any difference; I have an alternative truth. Who cares about what is really the truth? It's a terrible situation. Fr. Castelot was pointing this out almost 20 years ago.

## **Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

[March 3, 2019](#)

Sirach 27:4-7

Psalm 92

1 Corinthians 15:54-58

Luke 6:39-45

But look at how we are now with lies, fake news, and unwarranted statements in the press and media all the time. It is a terrible blight on our society if we continue to be very hurtful as we try to interact with one another within our own communities, but on a larger basis, across our country, and with other countries in the world if we can't trust that we are really trying to discover the truth, what is the truth, and proclaim that truth.

If we allow misstatements, fake news, alternate truth — all of that to go on, it will mean the end of any kind of civil society. So there really is a very important lesson that Sirach is telling us today: Be mindful of what we say. It reveals our character, but it also can be hurtful to our relationships with one another, and in a very narrow basis, in our family, our community, but in our world. So it's an important warning that we receive today.

But now for a few minutes we turn to this concluding part of Jesus' sermon, his basic platform about how we are to live, the Beatitudes: Blessed are the poor, blessed are those who mourn, blessed are the peacemakers, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice—all of those. But then as he went on last week with the greatest challenge in the Sermon on the Plain, which is also the Sermon on the Mount, do you remember last week he urged us to extend our love.

His one commandment, he says is to love one another, but don't just love those who love you, love your enemy! Imagine. Can we really do that, love an enemy, do good to those who hurt you, return good for evil? Those are the challenges that Jesus gives us if we're going to follow him. In today's lesson as Jesus kind of sums everything up, the one thing he really challenges us to is not to be a hypocrite, those in the gospel who pretended to follow Jesus. He called them hypocrites. Their very life is a lie. They pretend to be one way when they're another way, pretend to be good when they're evil.

So Jesus is very harsh about hypocrites. He wants us to be sincere and try to follow his way so that what we say matches what we do, that we don't pretend to follow Jesus, but we really do it — we're not a hypocrite. Jesus himself shows us the example. He not only said to love your enemy, do good to those who hurt you, he did it. If you remember when he was challenged in the garden after the Last Supper, people coming with clubs and swords to arrest him, and Peter took out a sword and started to slash at those who were coming for Jesus and cut off the ear of one of the servants of the high priest.

Jesus said, "Put away your sword. Don't try to defend me with violence, with hatred. I love that person." He proved it. He healed the one who had been wounded; he loved him. Jesus wasn't just words, he acted. There is nothing hypocritical about Jesus. On the cross when he's being tortured, mocked, suffering—extreme suffering, he prays for those who are doing it to him: "God forgive them." That's the kind of love Jesus is urging upon us in every situation in our local community, in our families, our neighborhoods, our country, our world.

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We must try to follow this way of Jesus and not be hypocrites, but be what we claim to be: disciples of Jesus who are willing to try to follow him and his way to bring his peace and the fullness of life into our world. This Wednesday we start the season of Lent. I'm sure we're all aware that that's a time of special prayer, special fasting, penance of one kind or another because it's a time for us to be converted. That's why we have the season of Lent, so that we can undergo every year a new conversion to the way of Jesus.

So this year perhaps more than we have at other years, if we're really aware of how profound that conversion has to be to follow Jesus, we need to enter more sincerely, consciously, find ways to pray more than we usually do, review our life, find out how we have to be converted and begin to change so that on Easter, as we complete this season of conversion, we become new people once more entering into the risen life of Jesus more fully than we ever have.

It's an opportunity to follow up on this challenge of Jesus to follow his way, to act against every kind of violence, and to bring his peace into our own personal life through that conversion, but also into our family, and into our world. I sincerely hope that each of us will begin this season of Lent with that intent to become an authentic disciple of Jesus, following his way of goodness and love and bring his joy and peace wherever we are.

**Editor's note:** *This homily was given March 3 at St. Ambrose Church in Detroit. The transcripts of Bishop Thomas Gumbleton's homilies are [posted weekly](#) to NCRonline.org. [Sign up here](#) to receive an email alert when the latest homily is posted.*