8 C 2025

Today, Jesus suggests that our limited insight into each other makes it very difficult to make judgments about others. It can be very tempting to think at times that we see clearly whereas others are blind. Jesus indicates that we are all blind to some degree, and that it is very often the case of the blind leading the blind rather than the enlightened.

Changing the metaphor, Jesus gives us the comic image of someone with a plank in their eye. We can easily understand a particle of dust in someone’s eye, or a piece of wood, but a plank is so incongruous. Jesus uses this humorous image to make us think. He is drawing attention to the all too human tendency to find fault with others while being blind to one’s own faults. The massive difference between a splinter and a plank suggests that the fault we complain of in others can be very small compared to the fault in ourselves that we refuse to see.

Let’s be honest. Most of the time we don’t see very clearly, especially when we engage in conversation with one another. Our perception of others can be skewed, judgments may be imperfect, incomplete, even hurtful. We never have the necessary insight into others. But we Franciscans do, when we listen, discern, and go forth. The remedy is “mindfulness”—paying attention to the present moment, enhancing self-awareness, keeping focused, cultivating compassion and acceptance. Article 19 of the Rule: *“Mindful that they are bearers of peace which must be built up unceasingly, they should seek out ways of unity and fraternal harmony through dialogue, trusting in the presence of the divine seed in everyone and in the transforming power of love and pardon.”*

Several years ago, our sister Carolyn Townes, OFS, gave us only one answer—dialogue with one another: to listen, to understand, then to speak from that understanding. And bringing her wisdom to be borne daily, fraternities were asked to “Learn. Discern. Go Forth.”

St Luke presents Jesus addressing four parables: enlightened leadership, formed discipleship, hypocrisy in correcting others, and bringing faith to action. Speech is presented as an expression of the heart—actions flowing from internal values. Fraternity members called to leadership must themselves have a truly enlightened conscience. Should they be lacking in understanding of the faith or the conviction to implement it, the fraternity suffers. Judgmental attitudes must be avoided which come from an awareness of others’ faults, and leads to a desire to correct them, while overlooking one’s own, often greater transgressions. God forbid you might know some who sanctimoniously find fault with others and neglect their own.

Actions as well as words reveal a true inner spirit. A living faith finds expression in deeds, such as forgiveness and charity—a true index of character. Action flows from what we are. As our lives and thinking are fashioned and formed as Franciscans, we will act as Franciscans. The fraternity is most formative in our lives, and important in values. Words and deeds are windows on the soul, revealing courage, honesty, gentleness, and thoughtfulness. God chose to reveal Himself through the human language of words and deeds. Jesus Himself, God’s Word, the incarnate language of God.

