

Readings for the Seventh Sunday After Pentecost
Extraordinary Form

Romans 6: 19-23

Brethren, I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your nature. For just as you presented the parts of your bodies as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness for lawlessness, so now present them as slaves to righteousness for sanctification. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free from righteousness. But what profit did you get then from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now that you have been freed from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit that you have leads to sanctification, and its end is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Matthew 7: 15-21

At that time Jesus said to his disciples: “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but underneath are ravenous wolves. By their fruits, you will know them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Just so, every good tree bears good fruit, and a rotten tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a rotten tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. So, by their fruits, you will know them. “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.

By Your Fruits, You are Known

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost – Romans 6: 19-23 / Matthew 7: 15-21

Ave Maria Catholic Church, July 24, 2022 – Fr. David M. Vidal

Today's passage from St. Matthew's gospel introduces a golden rule for our examination: *"By the fruits, you will know the tree."* Where are we in our spiritual life? Where is our heart? What is the state of our interior life? As difficult as it is to know ourselves, there is a way we can discover ourselves and understand where we are. We need to look at our actions. We need to see what we do, and then we will see where we are. By your fruits, you will know yourself.

The gospel of St. Luke also records this teaching of Jesus: *"For every tree is known by its own fruit . . . A good person out of the store of goodness in his heart produces good, but an evil person out of a store of evil produces evil; for from the fullness of the heart, the mouth speaks,"* (Lk 6: 44-45).

From the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. From the abundance of the heart, our actions flow. Look at your actions and see what you do and what you abstain from doing. Hear yourself, listen to your own words, and you will discover where your heart is.

Now, our exercise must not stop there. We should not only know where our heart is; we must also know where our heart must be. And we must know that our hearts were created to produce good fruits.

Which fruits are the ones that our hearts must produce? A fig tree must produce figs, an orange tree must produce oranges, and an apple tree must produce apples. And our hearts, what must they produce?

In his letter to the Galatians, St. Paul answers that question by providing the lists of the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit: *"Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."* (Gal 5:22-23). These fruits proceed from the Holy Spirit and liken us to him. This is God's life in us. It is a participation in divine goodness, truth, and beauty!

Rooted in the teachings of St. Paul and in the Sacred Tradition, the Church teaches that the fruits of the Holy Spirit are visible ways of acting in people who allow God's grace to be effective in them. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (n.1832) lists twelve fruits: *1. Charity 2. Generosity 3. Joy 4. Gentleness 5. Peace 6. Faithfulness 7. Patience 8. Modesty 9. Kindness 10. Self-control 11. Goodness and 12. Chastity.*

We are meant to produce good fruits. Like orange trees are meant to produce oranges, our hearts are meant to produce *charity, generosity, joy, gentleness, peace, faithfulness, patience, modesty, kindness, self-control, goodness, and chastity.*

Now imagine yourselves as being owners of an orange grove. What would happen if you discovered that your orange trees do not produce oranges? The trees might be green and big, but if they do not produce oranges, something is wrong with them. Clear and simple. You do not need to be a pomologist, an expert in fruits, to understand that.

Then, you might try to fertilize. You might try to use pesticides and do everything possible to save them. However, after so much work, if nothing works, you will have to cut them down.

God is patient with us. He expects good fruits from our lives. He expects *charity, generosity, joy, gentleness, peace, faithfulness, patience, modesty, kindness, self-control, goodness, and chastity*. And He comes again and again with his assistance. Sometimes with his consolations, sometimes with sufferings and pain.

So much has been said about the need to be awake. Today, many are fighting to wake up our society, but unfortunately, many forget that first of all, we must be awake to a life of virtue. Ideologies are always partial views. Ideologies focus on one idea and miss the true meaning of goodness.

We must open our eyes and see that if we want to be spiritually healthy, we must welcome *charity, generosity, joy, gentleness, peace, faithfulness, patience, modesty, kindness, self-control, goodness, and chastity* in our lives.

Then, we agree. We must wake up and “stay awake!” as Jesus told us, (Mt. 24: 42). This expression can be summarized with a single word, “*conversion*.”

Conversion is a supernatural act, something that we cannot reach without God’s grace. Conversion can be compared to a re-birth. How can rotten trees be turned into healthy trees?

That was Nicodemus’ question to Jesus: “*How can a person once grown old (in sin, we may add) be born again? Surely, he cannot reenter his mother’s womb and be born again, can he?*” (John 3: 4)

Jesus’s answer to Nicodemus explains what God can do for us: “*Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit . . . Do not be amazed that I told you, ‘you must be born from above.’*” (John 3: 5.7).

What is impossible for men is not impossible for God. To be born again is possible, conversion is possible, and God makes it possible for us. He offers us the possibility of being born again in Christ. That is a tremendous gift!

We must uproot the origin of evil from our souls and start a new life. That is what conversion means! Conversion is the transition from the state of sin to the state of grace, either by baptism or, in the case of those who have lost their baptismal innocence, by contrition and sacramental absolution.

Sin is the “turning away” from God (“aversion from God”) that leads to “perversion.” St. Augustine understands “perversion” as an act of “turning in the wrong direction.” Then, when we proudly turn our back on God, inferior things take control of us. When that happens, we who were called to enjoy freedom in God become slaves of our sins.

The only remedy for this situation is that we “convert” and “revert,” that is, that we turn around and return to our beautiful life in God.

As soon as we turn around, we will see those blessings coming to us: *charity, generosity, joy, gentleness, peace, faithfulness, patience, modesty, kindness, self-control, goodness, and chastity.*

By your fruits, you are known. Let us produce fruits of holiness, and we will be eternally blessed. Amen