

[Opinion](#)

[Spirituality](#)

[Scripture for Life](#)



Pope Francis listens to a question while responding to journalists aboard his flight from Tallinn, Estonia, to Rome Sept. 25, 2018. (CNS/Paul Haring)



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Ben Sirach tells us: "One's faults appear when one speaks." What a warning! Apparently, if we were smart, we'd speak a lot less. This goes well with Jesus' questions: "Can a blind person guide a blind person? Will not both fall into a pit?" That sounds good, but how are we to apply it?

Jesus also said, "I came into this world so that those who do not see might see, and those who do see might become blind" ([John 9](#)). That clears it up for us, doesn't it? (Hint: Jesus rarely seemed interested in making things easy to understand. He wanted to keep our minds open in wonder.)

## **Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

[February 27, 2022](#)

Sirach 27:4-7

Psalm 92

1 Corinthians 15:54-58

Luke 6:39-45

The Gospels for a few weeks come from the Sermon on the Plain which pulls together a collection of Jesus' sayings, sort of a mini Book of Wisdom, albeit with greater challenges than most proverbs offer. In the first part of what we hear today, Jesus uses sight as his primary metaphor. He starts by talking about blind people, then conjures up the image of an eye doctor who can't get near a patient because he's got a [log sticking out of his eye](#). Jesus is talking about how and what we see — all the while providing a commentary on how ridiculous we appear when we assume that we see rightly.

Suppose we considered Jesus' idea from a different perspective. What if we asked a blind person about what Jesus said? We just might get the response that a person born blind is the best teacher of the blind; one needs to be blind to understand the

challenges blind people have to overcome. (A sighted teacher might talk about a white cane; the non-sighted teacher realizes that the learner has no concept of whiteness.) This leads back to what Jesus taught in the Gospel of John: We need to admit our own areas of blindness. That, as they say in addiction programs, is the first step.

New Testament readers understand that Jesus' parable about blind people actually had almost nothing to do with physical eye problems. Using a popular literary technique of the time, Jesus made two statements about sight to elucidate what he wanted to say about the topic he addressed in between the two: he was really talking about teachers and disciples. The second part of this reading complements the first. Good teachers, like good trees, are recognizable not by their size or the noise they make, but by how the fruit of their teaching nourishes others and how their lives illustrate the message they preach. In our day, Jesus would be talking about where we look to find guidance about a life worth living — how to find and be fruitful trees.

Looking at our own context, we might consider the implications of the following two statements. According to Gallup polls, the number of people claiming church affiliation in the U.S. has dropped over 20% in the past 20 years, from nearly 70% in 1999 to 47% in 2020. At the same time, the self-help market is expected to grow twice as fast as inflation in the upcoming decade. This suggests that our independence-loving culture is effectively becoming ever-more individualistic and isolated — a situation that William de Britaine warned against in 1682 when he said: "He who will be his own counselor shall be sure to have a fool for his client."

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In his encyclical [\*Fratelli Tutti\*](#), Pope Francis describes the perils we face today. He laments that "the sense of belonging to a single human family is fading, and the dream of working together for justice and peace seems an outdated utopia. What reigns instead is a cool, comfortable and globalized indifference ... concealed behind a deceptive illusion: thinking that we are all-powerful, while failing to realize that we are all in the same boat" (*Fratelli Tutti*, Paragraph 30). Francis goes on to say, "Unless we recover the shared passion to create a community of belonging and solidarity worthy of our time ... the global illusion that misled us will collapse and leave many in the grip of anguish and emptiness" (Paragraph 36).

Jesus warned people about blindness and rotten fruit, Francis names our problem as a global illusion of disconnection that leads to meaninglessness. Jesus tells us to remove the beam that blocks our vision, Francis calls us to come together in dialogue to create a different world. Remembering Sirach's advice, today's readings suggest that we begin by speaking less and listening more. The very act of listening is an admission that we need to see through others' eyes as well as our own. We are all blind in some way; admitting it will lead us to wonder and make us care with and for one another. In the long run, that will be enough.

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