HOMILY ON THE EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME BY FATHER FRANCIS

**Cultivating goodness of heart that overflows in loving care for our neighbors**. Dear brothers and sisters, for the past two Sundays, we have been reading from the sermon of our Lord in the Gospel according to Saint Luke. This sermon in Luke titled Sermon on the Plain is equivalent to the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel according to Matthew. Both begin with beatitudes and end with the parable of the two houses. The only difference in the sermon of our Lord as recorded in Matthew and Luke is that Matthew included the concerns that are peculiar to Jewish Christians, while Luke excluded them because his original audience was largely gentile Christians. We find this sermon of our Lord in Matthew chapter five through seven and Luke chapter six, verses twenty through forty nine. The Sermon of our Lord in the synoptic gospels shows the Lord to be our new Moses who leads us across the troubled waters of this life to the living water of eternal life in the holy city of God.

Continuing with the Sermon on the Plain, our Gospel passage today centered on the demands of loving one’s neighbor ([Lk 6:37](http://www.usccb.org/bible/lk/6%3A37#50006037)–[42](http://www.usccb.org/bible/lk/6%3A42#50006042)) and good deeds as proof of one’s goodness ([Lk 6:43](http://www.usccb.org/bible/lk/6%3A43#50006043)–[45](http://www.usccb.org/bible/lk/6%3A45#50006045)). In the light of this, we shall take as our theme for the homily, **Cultivating goodness of heart that overflows in loving care for our neighbors**. Our keynote verse for this project is “A good tree does not bear rotten fruit, nor does a rotten tree bear good fruit. For every tree is known by its own fruit” (Luke 6:43-44). Dear brothers and sisters, the tree in this context represents us, while the good fruit speaks of goodness of heart summarized as love, patience and all the virtues that makes us Christlike.

What can we do to be good trees that bear good fruit? There is a subtle deceiver’s trap that we must never fall into. **This trap is to think that it is only by first bearing good fruit that we become good trees. In other words, to imagine that our good works and merits must precede or cause God’s love. “But it is like putting the cart before the horse.” How then do we become good trees? “**It is by rooting ourselves in Jesus; by turning to him incessantly, filling our hearts with him” (Luke 12:34; 24:32). Some practical helps in achieving this are spiritual reading, studying the faith, prayer, silence, penance, frequent reception of the sacraments, etc. These invariably, lead us to grow in the treasure of patience and perfect love that overflow into our actions and relationships with others. It is God first. Mother Teresa nailed it when she said, “We are able to do our work as beautifully as possible, because of the continual contact with Jesus Christ we have during the Mass and in the Blessed Sacrament.”

A passage in the Old Testament put it simply in these words, How can the young keep his way without fault - only by observing your words. With all my heart I seek you; do not let me stray from your commandments (Psalm 119: 9-10)**.** In a word, it is to be rooted in the Lord. Explaining this, the Word of God says, “Planted in the house of the LORD, they shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall bear fruit even in old age, they will stay fresh and green” (Psalm 92:13-14). This calls to mind the luxuriant and lush fruit trees that grew on the banks of the river that flowed from the temple of the Lord as seen by Ezekiel (Ezekiel 47:1-12). They produced abundant fruit all year round, because they are anchored on the water that flows from the heart of God. Hence, the secret of being a good tree is made plain in the Word of God when it says, “Listen to me, you who pursue justice, who seek the Lord; Look to the rock from which you were hewn” (Isaiah 51:1).

The gospel acclamation today clarifies this point further, using the imagery of the light. Hence, to the question, how can we shine like lights in the world? Only one answer is correct and that is by holding onto the Word of God, the Word of Life. It is only then that we can see well to guide our brothers and sisters in the right path. It is only then that we can see clearly to remove the splinter in our brother’s eye. Otherwise, we will find ourselves in the mold and attitude of being quick to criticize and to condemn; but slow to help and to uplift.

It appears hard to be a good tree that bears good fruit. It seems easier to take the route of activism, of just being a sporadic “do gooder.” The Word of God assures us that it is possible to be a good tree, otherwise the Lord will not have asked that of us. St Paul captured this truth when he wrote, “I can do all things in the Lord who strengthens me”( Philippians 4:13).

Anchoring ourselves in the Lord by using the means available to us listed above is the only way. To try to do it in any other way is to court failure. In the light of that St John Paul II issued this warning, “The blindness of pride deceived our first parents into thinking themselves sovereign and autonomous, and into thinking that they could ignore the knowledge, which comes from God.” Mary on the other hand, showed us the way of humility, the way of surrender to God. This is the way of cultivating the goodness of heart that overflows into love that has no end. Peace be with you.