

Homily - Year 8 C - March 3, 2019

Most of us have read some of Mark Twain's works at one point in our lives. He exhibited moments of a quick wit even when not writing. One night he was at a banquet. A businessman, notorious for having attained his wealth by using unsavory practices, squeezing money from clients and tenants in his many substandard apartments, also attended. At one point in the evening this gentleman cornered Mark Twain and piously told Mr. Twain that he wanted to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, to climb to the top of Mt. Sinai, and there read aloud the ten commandments. Mark Twain suggested something even better to the blowhard: "Why don't you stay in right here in Boston and start practicing them."

We do not like hypocrites. Jesus, using the metaphor of a speck in one's eye, strongly speaks against hypocrites. We may quickly want to jump in and say: "Boy, I'm glad I'm not a hypocrite!" Mark Twain easily pierced the evident hypocrisy of this businessman, but what about the subtle hypocrisy that may exist in our own lives?

We quickly set moral standards for the lives of others. "Boy, I am so glad that I am not like so-and-so." That's being hypocritical. Actually, when you come right down to it, we are quick to set moral standards for others. In fact, sometimes, we spend more time setting moral standards for others, without inspecting our own moral standards.

Jesus attacks in a very special way the religious leaders of the time. Religious leaders promoted certain life styles and obligations for others, but they exempted themselves from observing the rules that they imposed on others. For that, Jesus condemned them. They were guilty of hypocrisy. So, too, ourselves, when we impose standards on others, but fail to observe those standards for ourselves, we commit hypocrisy.

We can easily fall into the sin of hypocrisy because we look for the faults in others without looking into our own faults. Jesus' metaphor about the speck and the plank illustrates that we cannot tend to the faults of others unless we first recognize and eradicate our own faults.

How do we measure the presence of hypocrisy? Easy. Has anyone ever said to you: "You should talk!" "You should talk" means that likewise hypocrisy has entered your life.

Overcoming our latent and blatant hypocrisy comes from deep introspection into our lives. We should examine our lives in light of Jesus teaching as well as the teaching that comes from the first reading. I paraphrase the words of Sirach in the first reading. One's speech, one's words reveal the person's mind. Don't praise anyone until that person has

spoken because the words that come from the mouth reveal the depths of one's heart.

As far as I know, only two antidotes exist for hypocrisy: perfection and honesty. Perfection doesn't exist in this world. So that leaves honesty. Honesty sheds light on the hypocrisy that may loom in the depths of our hearts.

In a few days we begin the season of Lent, a time associated with giving up. Giving up something we like is good. Spending time examining our souls and looking for hypocrisy is better because it is harder than just giving up something to eat. Come to think of it - maybe we should do both: give up something for lent and inspecting our souls for any signs of hypocrisy with total honesty. If we don't do that, then the only ones we fool are ourselves.