

by Joan Mitchell, CSJ

Open a bible to Luke 6 and light a candle beside it.

LEADER: Wise and loving God, your words, like seeds, fall into our lives and send out roots to sprout, flower, and flourish in abundant fruit.

ALL: May your words bear fruit in us.

LEADER: Let us listen to proverbs by which each of us live.

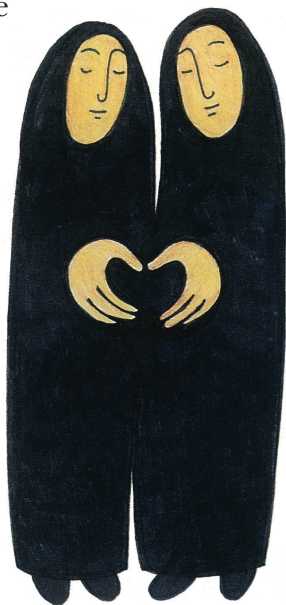
Group members take turns saying a proverb.

LEADER: These are our ways, O Wisdom. We come to examine their fruit.

ALL: Wise and loving God, teach us your ways.

Jesus' sayings in Sunday's gospel give us a collection of proverbs. The blind can't lead the blind. Students are not greater than their teachers. Don't try to take a speck from your neighbor's eye when you don't see the plank in your own. A good tree produces good fruit.

These sayings which Luke includes in Jesus' sermon on the plain are bits of folk wisdom like those



For those who realize that they must die, quarrels cease.

SUNDAY

by SUNDAY

Ben Franklin passes on in Poor Richard's Almanac: "Early to bed, early to rise makes a person healthy, wealthy, and wise." Proverbs are usually short. Usually proverbs have a rhyme, a vivid image, or a twist of phrase that makes them easy to remember.

Proverbs provide concrete, everyday ways to communicate wisdom to others and to new generations. They use familiar and down-to-earth imagery such as early birds and worms that make their wisdom accessible to all. Most cultures have proverbs that hold the values and express the wisdom of the people.

Wisdom accumulates with experience. For Israel wisdom begins in wonder at the



As a bee gathers nectar from the flower and does not harm it or its fragrance or its color, so should we walk through the village.

abundance and beauty of hills clothed in flowers and wheat, in awe at the reliable turning of days to night and winter to spring. For Christians Jesus is wisdom. His every

move and every word reveal the heart of God wanting our friendship and wholeness.

- What proverbs do you live by?
- What proverbs did your parents or guardians quote often?
- What proverbs do you quote to your children, students, or coworkers?

Artist Ansgar Holmberg has created a series of fun holy cards she calls NUNK Cards. Like the proverbs and sayings in the bible, NUNK Cards preserve sayings and proverbs to remember. The artist illustrates contemporary sayings that can inspire our living and prompt new ways of praying. Enjoy them.

GOSPEL

Jesus teaches us wisdom.

NARRATOR: Jesus told his disciples a parable.

JESUS 1: Can one blind person show another blind person the way? Won't they both fall in a ditch? Students are not above their teacher. When they complete their studies, they are equal to their teacher.

JESUS 2: Why do you see a splinter in your neighbor's eye but not notice the beam in your own? How can you say to your neighbor, "Let me take the splinter out of your eye"



when you yourself do not see the beam in your own? Hypocrite, first, take the beam out of your own eye; then you will see clearly to take the splinter out of your neighbor's eye.

JESUS 3: A good tree does not produce decayed fruit, nor a decayed tree produce good fruit. A tree is known by its fruit. You do not collect figs from thornbushes, nor pick grapes from brambles. A good person brings forth

If you do not find God in the next person you meet, it's a waste of time looking for God further.

Gandhi

goodness from the good in his or her heart. The mouth speaks out of the abundance of the heart.

Luke 6.39-45

Jesus' proverbs call us to practical love.

Jesus' two most developed proverbs in Sunday's gospel contrast a splinter with a beam and a good tree with a decayed tree. Both proverbs make their points through drawing on people's concrete, everyday experience—in the first case, of carpentry; in the second case, of orchards.

The Greek word *dokos* refers to the beams to which carpenters attach rafters and studs in the whole support structure of a house. The contrast between the splinter and the beam is not only

between tiny and immense, but also between a single speck and a fault underlying a whole system of behavior.

The splinter and beam imagery exaggerates the difference between the one, small thing one sees in the neighbor and whole, huge, deeply-rooted faults one can't see in one's self. This is a good-humored proverb that makes the same point as Scottish poet Bobby Burns's famous poem "To a Louse," which ends with a louse crawling up the back of a lady's hair in church and the

poet's observation, "Ah, to see ourselves as others see us." Criticizing others invites their scrutiny in return.

● **What experiences have you had that bear out the truth that both Jesus' and Burns's proverbs convey?**

A good tree produces good fruit. A dead or decaying tree produces no fruit or poor fruit. Trees are known by the fruit they produce. The proverb implies people's hearts work just like fruit trees. Their actions are fruit that reveals their hearts.

In Luke's gospel this proverb is one more instance where the evangelist sounds a food theme. One beatitude congratulates the hungry. This proverb praises people whose actions are food for others and offer them nourishment.

It invites us to assess what kind of nourishment we offer those around us.

New proverbs arise to



God's love is like clothing that wraps us and enfolds us, embraces and shelters us, surrounds and never deserts us.

Elizabeth Johnson

educate us to new wisdom. For example, trees have importance not only for their fruit but for their capacity to transform carbon dioxide into oxygen. They make the air we breathe. People who care for earth teach us, “People need trees more than trees need people.”

- What proverbs that you know or use express the values and wisdom you most want to pass on to your children or those you teach or work with?
- What are your favorite contemporary proverbs from bumperstickers?
- What proverb would you pay to have framed in your living room?

Luke’s four beatitudes stand in tension with four woes. These opposites invite us to assess where we stand on a continuum between poor and rich, full and hungry, laughter and sorrow, persecuted and popular. The beatitudes invite us to identify ways we struggle with these opposites in our lives.

Our cultural proverbs express values such as consumerism, individualism,



Death is simply a letting go of that which was never ours in the first place.

or competition which stand in tension with such Christian values as sharing goods, solidarity among the members of the human family, and cooperation.

- What tensions do you experience between sharing and acquiring, individualism and solidarity, competition and cooperation?
- What proverbs do you find on the editorial page of your local newspaper today?

FIRST READING

Sirach teaches Jewish wisdom.

The three proverbs that form Sunday’s first reading tell us that speaking reveals who people really are. These proverbs come from the book of Sirach or Ecclesiasticus. The author of this collection of Jewish wisdom describes his purpose and gives his name in Sirach 50.27: “Wise instruction, appropriate proverbs, I have written in this book, I, Jesus, son of Eleasar, son of Sirach, as they gushed forth from my understanding.”

Sirach wrote his collections of Jewish wisdom in Jerusalem sometime between 200 and 175 B.C., the period in which Greek ways and Greek learning became increasingly popular among Jews. Sirach wrote in Hebrew to preserve Jewish ways. His wisdom is practical and draws its imagery from everyday life in Palestine.

Sunday’s three proverbs compare the act of speaking to three common activities in Jesus’ time—shaking grain husks from seeds, firing pottery, caring for fruit trees.



Those who think forgiveness is weak have never tried it.

Archbishop Tutu

DO SOMETHING

CHARITY

JUSTICE

- Many lawn signs post simple messages to promote building community where we live. Love your neighbor. All are welcome (which comes in many languages). Peace. Help build community online and on-lawn with your postings.

Our speech reveals us.

When a sieve is shaken,
the husks appear;
so do people's faults
when they speak.
Just as the test
of what the potter molds
is in the furnace, so is
conversation
the test of a person.
The fruit of a tree shows
the care it has had;
so, too, people's speech
discloses the bent of their minds.
Praise no one before he or she
speaks,
for it is then that people are
tested.

Sirach 27.4-7

Wisdom sayings draw on the familiar experience of ordinary people. They use the known and concrete to teach the unknown and conceptual. For example, along the U.S. Gulf coast people have a very concrete way of talking about conflicts on the ladder of success. "Just like a pail of crabs, when one tries to crawl out the others pull it down."

One of the sayings of Dom Helder Camara, retired bishop of Recife, Brazil, expresses hopes that have grown out of the base community movement. "When one dreams alone, it is only a dream. When we dream together, it is the beginning of reality."

● How do you respond to the vision of Christianity in Dom Helder's saying?

Why not make an online retreat during Lent? Visit our website—goodgroundpress.com—go to the Quick Links column at the top right of the home page and click on Online Retreats.

For Christians Ash Wednesday begins Lent, a season of prayer, fasting, and renewal. Fasting has an old-fashioned ring that recalls childhood memories of giving up sweets. But the real purpose of fasting is changing habits. We develop compulsions—a handful of chocolate chips every evening or a drink or a flare for seeing what's wrong in every situation or making more commitments than one can keep.

Weight Watchers claims people can change a habit in 21 days. Lent sets the number at 40. Fasting is about trying a new habit, breaking a compulsion. A compulsion is an action people thoughtlessly repeat. People in weight-loss groups tell stories of eating a box of candy without realizing it. Sitting around without exercising is a habit that increases rather than decreases fatigue.

On Ash Wednesday Catholics remember we are dust. We are human and subject to compulsions. We are human and able to change.

● What habit do you want to develop or break to become a more whole, healthy Christian on Easter Sunday?

PRAY

Pray as a conclusion to your reflections on the Sunday scriptures. Take a brief time to surface your concerns, then share them with the group.

LEADER: Caring God, you call us to be fruitful and nourish others with our lives.

ALL: May we grow together during Lent toward the new life Jesus holds out toward us.

LEADER: May Easter joy flourish among us.

ALL: Amen.

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Next Sunday is the 1st Sunday of Lent. How will your group or your family keep Lent this year? Consider widening your **prayer** to include neighbors you do not know. Try **fasting** from quick judgments or from speaking hastily. Give **money** or **time** to a group in your community who needs you. Support each other by checking in each week.