

## Homily for 22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

There is a wise person of prayer who once wrote these words: “When I was young I was a revolutionary. My prayer to God was: ‘Lord, give me the energy to change the world.’ As I approached middle-age and realized that my life was half-gone without my changing a single soul, I changed my prayer to: ‘Lord, give me the grace to change all those who come into contact with me. Just my family and friends and I shall be satisfied.’ Now that I am old and my days are numbered, I have begun to see how foolish I have been. My one prayer now is: ‘Lord, give me the grace to change myself.’ If I had prayed for this from the start, I would not have wasted my life.”

Wise words. They point to the simple truth that no one of us has the capacity to change another person. The only person we can change is ourselves. When we learn that lesson well, we begin to realize that pointing fingers at the behavior of others is an exercise in futility because it prevents us from pointing our fingers at the one person that we have a right to criticize – ourselves.

Tough lesson to learn. We live in an age of finger pointing. Look at our politics...it is an exercise in finger pointing. Whether the candidates are national or local, issues are replaced by accusations.

But we don't need politics to teach us how to point fingers. We are pretty Olympic at it ourselves. We love to point fingers at each other and notice what everyone else is doing wrong. We nit-pick everyone else's behavior to death. And don't we love to gloat when we are proven right and they are proven wrong.

The Pharisees and the scribes in today's Gospel are doing just that – they are nit-picking the actions of the disciples. They are finding fault with what they do. And by the standards of the day they were indeed breaking the Jewish law.

But Jesus turns on them and aptly points out that what is truly wrong are those things that come from within a person. And nothing could be worse from within ourselves than taking cheap shots at everyone else while never bothering to look at ourselves. And this should not be confused with being willing to speak out for those unjustly treated and disenfranchised from what is justly theirs. That is a function of prophetic witness to our faith. What we speak about here is the temptation we face to pick at the behavior of others because it differs from our own.

We often forget that the Gospel is not a tool by which we measure the actions of others. Rather, the Gospel is a mirror by which we judge ourselves. It takes courage to look in the mirror and even greater courage to change what we see. But unless we are willing to realize that

the only person we can change is ourselves and unless we are willing to start making those changes, that we end up wasting our lives. We look out at others rather than looking in at ourselves. And when we do that we waste our lives and hardly contribute to the building up of the reign of God in our world