

Daily Office Devotional, Thursday, April 29, 2021
The week of the fourth Sunday of Easter
The Rev. David W. Perkins, Th.D.

Today we celebrate the Feast of Catherine of Siena. (See below.)

Daily Office Lectionary readings

AM Psalm 50; PM Psalm [59, 60] or 114, 115

Wisdom 5:9-23; Colossians 2:8-23; Luke 6:39-49

Morning Prayer, Rite 2, page 75, *Book of Common Prayer*

Evening Prayer, Rite 2, page 115, *Book of Common Prayer*

Compline (Night Prayer), Page 127, *Book of Common Prayer*

Daily Office Gospel, Luke 6:39-49

39He also told them a parable: ‘Can a blind person guide a blind person? Will not both fall into a pit? 40A disciple is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully qualified will be like the teacher. 41Why do you see the speck in your neighbor’s eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? 42Or how can you say to your neighbor, “Friend, let me take out the speck in your eye,” when you yourself do not see the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor’s eye. 43‘No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit; 44for each tree is known by its own fruit. Figs are not gathered from thorns, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. 45The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good, and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks. 46‘Why do you call me “Lord, Lord,” and do not do what I tell you? 47I will show you what someone is like who comes to me, hears my words, and acts on them. 48That one is like a man building a house, who dug deeply and laid the foundation on rock; when a flood arose, the river burst against that house but could not shake it, because it had been well built. 49But the one who hears and does not act is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the river burst against it, immediately it fell, and great was the ruin of that house.’

David's Reflections

In his poem “In a Dark Time,” Roethke asks himself
Dark, dark my light, and darker my desire.
My soul, like some heat-maddened summer fly,

Keeps buzzing at the sill. Which I is I.

Portions of Jesus' teaching here might prompt such an awareness and questioning in us. This portion of Luke's Sermon on the Plain parallels material in Matthew 6 and 7 of the Sermon on the Mount. One of Jesus' most remarkable aphorisms appears in both passages, the statements about the mote and the beam.

Jesus tells us that when we see a "speck" in the eye of another, we actually are not seeing very well. Rather, we have a beam in our own eye that impedes our vision of the other. Could it be that we are standing so close to that other person that the speck we think we see in their eye really is a reflection, as in a mirror, of the beam in our own eye? We are dealing here with deliberate hyperbole—one cannot literally get a beam in one's eye.

When I am feeling negative about another and expressing that negative feeling in criticism, it may well be that there genuinely IS a speck there. Yet, what I also can be sure about is that larger blemishes exist in my own "eye" that are impeding my vision. To quote Roethke, "Which I is I."

The real point of Jesus' teaching has to do with our starting point. If we are exercising rugged emotional and spiritual honesty, we are going to be only too aware of our own darkness, our own inner evil, our own capacity to be destructive in our relationships with others. Jesus challenges us to realize that our most rugged exercise of judgment must begin not with others but with ourselves. Roethke's image of that heat-maddened summer fly buzzing at the sill comes to mind here. The poet displays the kind of self awareness worthy of cultivating.

Otherwise, we will be distracted by the only-too-plentiful wounds and shortcomings of those around us. We will expend energy in frustration and in efforts to correct what we see before us in others, while those same or very similar areas of need in ourselves will go neglected and perhaps only become more severe.

One caveat—Jesus' teaching here is not intended to lead us to be harsh with ourselves. Shame, that feeling of personal inadequacy, already lurks within and is easily awakened. That shame can readily convert to self-contempt and to anger with self. Note the lack of self-judgment in the ending of Roethke's poem.

A fallen man, I climb out of my fear.

The mind enters itself, and God the mind,

And one is One, free in the tearing wind.

[*The Collected Poems of Theodore Roethke* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), p. 231.]

Rather than harsh self-criticism, Jesus invites us to self-honesty, a realistic and gentle awareness of our woundedness and brokenness. If we need tenderness from God, we certainly need it from ourselves. We also have a standing invitation from Jesus to open those areas of ourselves to God's loving and healing presence. Only as we disregard and conceal our absolute need for that love do we become vulnerable to the harshness with others that this passage warns against.

Collect of the Day, The Fourth Sunday of Easter

O God, whose Son Jesus is the good shepherd of your people; Grant that when we hear his voice we may know him who calls us each by name, and follow where he leads; who, with you and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.* (BCP, 225)

Collect of the Weekdays of Easter

Almighty and everlasting God, you have given your Church the great joy of the resurrection of Jesus Christ: Give us also the greater joy of the kingdom of your elect, when the flock of your Son will share in the final victory of its Shepherd, Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Today we celebrate the Feast of Catherine of Siena, reformer and spiritual teacher (died 29 April 1380 CE). http://www.satucket.com/lectionary/Catherine_Siena.htm

Collect of the Feast of Catherine of Siena

Almighty and everlasting God, who kindled the flame of thy love in the heart of your servant Catherine of Siena: Grant unto us the same strength of conviction and power of love that, as we rejoice in her triumph, we may profit by her example; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

A Collect for Protection

O God, the life of all who live, the light of the faithful, the strength of those who labor, and the repose of the dead: We thank you for the blessings of the day that is past, and humbly ask for your protection through the coming night. Bring us in safety to the morning hours; through him who died and rose again for us, your Son our Savior Jesus Christ. *Amen.* (BCP, 124)

For Peace

Almighty God, kindle, we pray, in every heart the true love of peace, and guide with

your wisdom those who take counsel for the nations of the earth, that in tranquility your dominion may increase until the earth is filled with the knowledge of your love; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.* (BCP, 258)

In the Order of Worship for Evening

Blessed are you, O Lord, the God of our fathers, creator of the changes of day and night, giving rest to the weary, renewing the strength of those who are spent, bestowing upon us occasions of song in the evening. As you have protected us in the day that is past, so be with us in the coming night; keep us from every sin, every evil, and every fear; for you are our light and salvation, and the strength of our life. To you be glory for endless ages. *Amen.* (BCP, 113)

A Collect for Mission

O God, you manifest in your servants the signs of your presence: Send forth upon us the spirit of love, that in companionship with one another your abounding grace may increase among us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.* (BCP, 125)