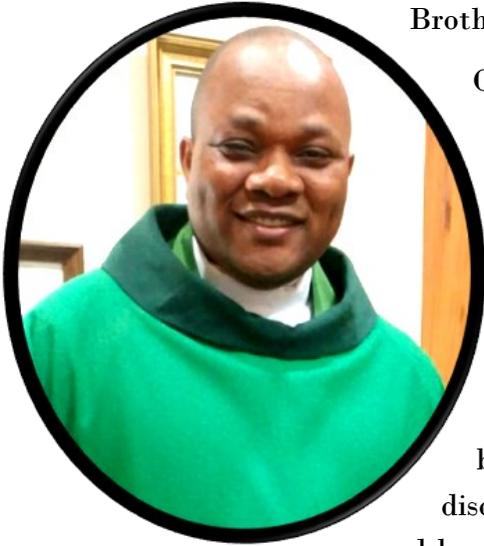


FROM THE DESK OF **Fr. Julius**



Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

On this final Sunday of Ordinary time, we are all reminded to prepare ourselves for the upcoming Ash Wednesday which ushers in the holy season of Lent. This is a day for prayer, fasting and abstinence. In our liturgy this week, Jesus challenges us to use our spoken words as he used his in his preaching and healing ministries -- to heal, to restore, and to bring back life, joy and hope.

As if our Lord Jesus were writing this well-crafted parable in our first reading, Ben Sirach, an early Jewish sage is discoursing on the way that words come from our mouths, and how they reveal our interior beliefs; he uses specific phrasing such as the *grain and husks* being separated in a farmer's sieve, as the quality of the *metal is revealed in the potter's fire*, and as the size and *quality of a tree's fruit* reveal the care it has received from the planter. In the Second Reading, St Paul assures the early Christian community that physical death does not destroy [*sting!*] who we are; we can rest assured that Christ will destroy death forever. He advises the Corinthian Christians to "*be firm, steadfast, always fully devoted to the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.*"

In today's Gospel passage, continuing the Sermon on the Plain, Jesus echoes the teachings we heard in Ben Sirach. Again, with many visual references such as the *blind leading the blind*, the *splinter in our neighbor's eye*, the *good tree bearing only good fruit*, our Lord is urging us to value total honesty and integrity in all our personal affairs with others. Are we not aware that many times we miss the mark in our perception of others, even letting our own spiritual blindness rank another's? Why do we want to judge others when we have the same and sometimes greater faults as the one we are judging? No one, except God is good enough to judge others. Wisdom has it that inwardly keeping silent keeps us even from our own transgressions.

Abraham Lincoln once said, "the only one who can criticize is the one who has the heart to help." Therefore, if as Christians we do not have the hearts to help each other, then St. Philip Neri's famous admission, watching the misbehavior of a drunkard: "There goes Philip but for the grace of God." could be a clarification to our reflection this week.

Blessed Sunday!