

Reflection

- What do you think of when you hear someone say: “I’m looking out for number one”?
- Most times we see it as a very selfish comment. Although “looking out for number one”, is the main goal of most of the world today, as Christians we are taught just the opposite. The church in general has condemned and criticized this “Me first” mentality as self-centered and unchristian. And all that is true.
- Our scriptures constantly remind us about looking out for the needs of others rather than our own. But not today’s scripture readings.
- Today’s readings remind us that if we are to be all that God wants us to be and put others above ourselves, we must first look out for number one, especially in one particular area.
- What is this area? It is the area of personal holiness. When it comes to developing a life of holiness, we must adopt a “Me-first” mentality. Look out for number one. Not for selfish reasons, but for holiness reasons.
- Our readings today remind us we cannot go about judging and correcting everybody else when we have some glaring faults in our own life that must be dealt with. And if we think we don’t have any faults, we’d better look again.
- Today’s readings and the season of Lent which we enter into this coming week, are all about self-reflection, self-examination – we are called to “look into our hearts”. In fact, the theme of our parish Lenten program this year is “Open our Hearts” – there is still time to sign up!
- Why look in the heart? Jesus just told us: From the fullness of the heart, the mouth speaks.” What’s in your heart comes out your mouth – true isn’t it?
- Our heart is where it all comes from. It’s where we keep what we love, what is important to us, what we believe, our attitudes, what we value – who we really are. It all resides in our hearts.

- But it doesn't just stay there unnoticed. It can't. Just like trees bear fruit to show the type of tree they are – these things in our hearts show themselves, come out - in our words and our actions. And these words and actions show us and others who we really are – on the inside.
- Jesus speaks of the words and actions that come from our hearts as our Fruit. He tells us if our hearts are pure and clean we will produce good fruit, if they are not so clean – the fruit will not be good.
- And Jesus is not asking us to be something we are not. He doesn't ask us to produce more fruit than anyone else, or better fruit than others – just good fruit, using the gifts He has given us.
- The good fruit Jesus is referring to is not apples or oranges. He is talking about the fruits of the Holy Spirit.
- In his letter to the Galatians, Saint Paul tells us that followers of Jesus are gifted with the Holy Spirit. If we welcome that Spirit and let it work, the Spirit cleans our hearts and makes them pure. And we can be sure this is happening because we will see certain types of fruit – certain words and actions that will come out from us. And the world will see it too.
- These are called fruits of the Spirit. Saint Paul listed nine of them. Listen to what can come out of us as our hearts become clean: Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Generosity, Faithfulness, Gentleness, and Self-control. If you Google “Catholic Fruits of the Spirit” you will find more detailed descriptions of these 9 fruits.
- There is a little meditation book I use during Lent and each day it suggests a fruit we might bear that day. It gives a practical action we can take to show these fruits. Here are a few examples, maybe you will find one or two that work for you.
- Make a call or write a letter to someone who needs cheering up. Compliment someone, send a thank you note, do an act of kindness for someone that would never expect it, say something encouraging, pray a rosary for those you love and those in need,

listen to someone you would otherwise ignore. All visible examples of the Fruits of the Spirit.

- Today's scriptures remind us - and Lent calls us- to look closely at our lives, our words, our actions, what we do with our time – take a close look and see if we see any or all of those 9 fruits.
- Because what we see, and don't see, tells the story of who we really are and what is going on in our hearts. And tells the story of how close we are to Jesus.
- And if we don't see these fruits, we need to let the Holy Spirit do a little heart cleaning. Lent reminds us that even the cleanest of homes has a little dust when you run your finger across the window ledge.
- So how do we let the Holy Spirit clean our hearts? The season of Lent recommends three important ways: by Prayer, Fasting and Alms Giving (Acts of Love and Charity).
- Let's look at the first two, Prayer and Fasting because they always lead to the third.
- Prayer during Lent starts by being really honest with ourselves. Not being afraid to ask ourselves: "Is there a plank in my eye that is blinding me? What is that obstacle stopping me from being more like our teacher Jesus – is it fear, is it being too judgmental, is it holding back on mercy and forgiveness, is it holding onto anger? (all the things Jesus cautioned us about in last Sunday's Gospel).
- We shouldn't hesitate to go to Jesus in prayer and say to Him; "Lord, I don't like what I see, change me please." Or "Lord, I want to see that obstacle that I am not seeing. Show it to me so I can change". The Lord just waits for that invitation!
- If your feeling worried, nervous or anxious ask the Lord for the fruit of Peace, that calm feeling only He can give.
- Lately, I find the car in front of me is always moving too slowly. Or when someone is speaking to me I am often planning out my response or just wishing they would get to the point – instead of really listening to what they are saying. So, this Lent I am

praying for the fruit of Patience. The Lord just waits for us to ask!!

- And Fasting is more than just seeing if you can give up coffee or chocolate for 40 days. We can fast from putting ourselves in situations and places and things that distract us from doing God's will (too much time watching TV or on the computer, or spending too much time at work - things like that). We can fast from impulses (anger, envy, judging), we can even fast from people (those who tempt us or who are bad influences). All we need to do is look at those fruits of the Spirit not coming out of us and we will know what to pray, and what to fast from. The Holy Spirit will help us – give us the strength to Fast.
- And as our hearts become more and more clean, as we listen to Jesus' teachings, follow His examples, and let the Spirit fill us with goodness, we will see the "good fruit"- those fruits of the Spirit come out in what we say and do.
- Our mouths will say beautiful things; speak words of love, kindness, gentleness.
- Our actions will be those filled with self-control, generosity, peace, and patience. We will be faithful people – faithful to Christ's teachings and to each other.
- So, as we enter this season of Lent, let's look out for number one. Let's take a good look inward first and take care of our own hearts so that we can then take a clearer look around us and better see those opportunities to bring God's love into a world so desperately in need.