

# CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

8th Sunday in Ordinary Time | For Sunday, March 3rd, 2019

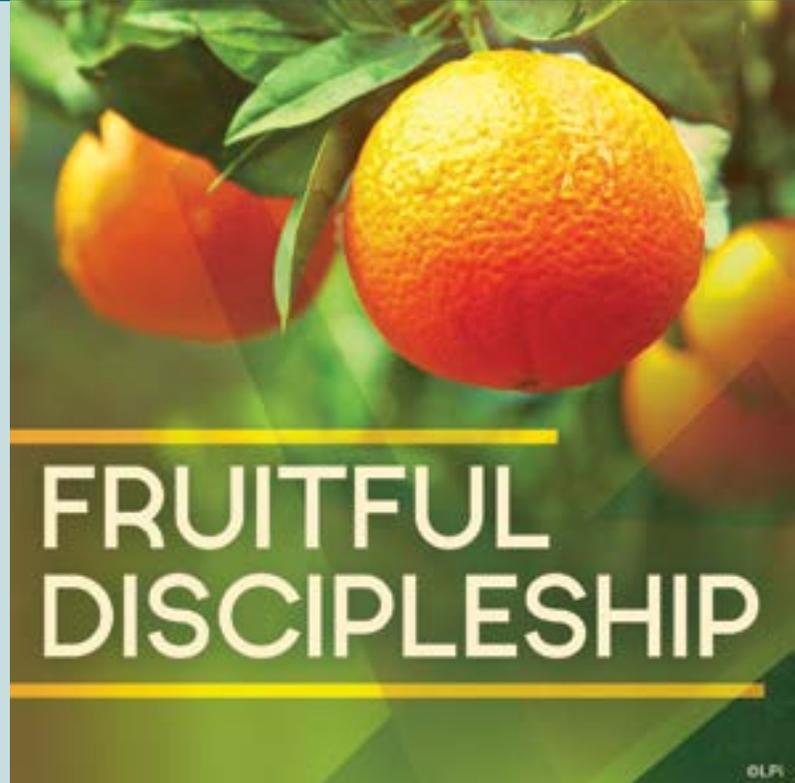
## Cultivate Good Fruits

Written by Br. Silas Henderson, S.D.S.

Sirach 27:4-7

1 Corinthians 15:54-58

Luke 6:39-45



As I look back on my own spiritual journey, I'm quite aware of the special role that the saints have played in the development of my faith. In fact, much like St. Ignatius Loyola, I can say that the stories of the saints are both a large part of why I became Catholic and why I am a religious brother today.

As I've matured, I've come to recognize that the witness of the saints serves as a sort of lived *Lectio Divina* on the Gospel. Their lives — imperfect as they were — help us to recognize what it means to live in and for that reign of God, which Jesus proclaimed in both his teachings and in the signs and wonders he performed.

Among those saints who grace the liturgical calendar of the Church here in the United States is St. Katharine Drexel, the foundress of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, whose memory we celebrate on March 3rd. Although her commemoration is superseded by the celebration of the 8th Sunday in Ordinary Time this year, I think her story has something to say to us about the Gospel we hear proclaimed in this Sunday's liturgy.

The daughter of one of the wealthiest men in America, Katharine Drexel was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1858. While visiting Europe, Katharine worked to recruit priests and the religious to minister to Native Americans. It was during this trip that Pope Leo XIII suggested Katharine herself become a missionary. The following year, she established schools in the Dakotas, Wyoming, Montana, California, Oregon, and New Mexico.

In 1889, Katharine entered the novitiate of the Sisters of Mercy, and in 1891, she professed her vows as the first member of the [Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament for Indians and Colored People](#). Opening a novitiate in Philadelphia, she received 21 new sisters in the first year. The new community's first mission was in New Mexico.

Following the death of her father in 1901, Katharine and her sister each received an inheritance amounting to one thousand dollars a day. Other missions and schools soon followed, including Xavier University in New Orleans. Pope St. Pius X approved the Rule of the Congregation in 1907, and Katharine used her tremendous inheritance to subsidize the works of her community.

Following a heart attack in 1935, Mother Drexel was forced to return to the motherhouse, where she dedicated the remainder of her life to prayer and

contemplation. Katharine Drexel died on March 3, 1955, and was canonized in the year 2000.

In [today's Gospel](#), Jesus reminds us:

*A good tree does not bear rotten fruit,  
nor does a rotten tree bear good fruit.  
For every tree is known by its own fruit ...  
A good person out of the store of goodness in his heart produces good.*

As a young woman, Katharine Drexel saw the divisions that existed between the different ethnic groups and cultures within the United States. She saw that too many women, men, and children, were living without those things that we all need to live full and healthy lives: food and water, education, adequate shelter and clothing, meaningful work, and opportunities to celebrate our faith. The Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy were the touchstones of her life of ministry and prayer. She dedicated her life to cultivating a garden of good fruits that nourished those who were to be found at the furthest margins of American society. And yet, in all of this, she also recognized that the work was not just hers or that of her religious sisters — they were co-workers in the Lord's vineyard. As she reflected in an instruction to religious community:

*Therefore, we pray for ourselves, for the community, for all its works: for the graces that will enable you to carry the teachings of our Lord to the Indian and Black Peoples; graces that will cause your word to [bear fruit]; graces that will make of you apostles imbued with a lively faith to animate those with whom you come in contact, and with ardent love of God to enable you not only to love him personally, but to bring others to participate in this love for him. (from an instruction to the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament)*

As we look toward the season of Lent, our Gospel this Sunday invites us to look at our lives with clear eyes and to reflect on the fruit of our lives. Are there areas in our lives that need to be more carefully nurtured and tended? Are there "branches" that need to be pruned, so that other areas of our lives — including our prayer and ministry — can be more fruitful?

How can we, like St. Katharine Drexel, more effectively respond to the needs of those around us, sharing our time, talent, and material goods to help others bear greater fruit in their own lives? Reflect in the coming days on what good works you might take on this Lent to help you to truly become the faithful — and fruitful — disciple the Lord is calling you to be.

*Br. Silas Henderson, S.D.S.*

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## PRAYER

Heavenly Father,  
We see violence and despair all around us.  
We want to help but don't know where to start.  
Help us to take the words of your Son to heart.  
Strengthen us to offer blessings when we are cursed.  
Give us the humility to not strike back when we are wronged.  
Remind us not to judge but to understand.  
You have shown us such great mercy, Lord.  
May we also show it to others,  
and may our small acts of love  
make a difference in this calloused world,  
just as the sacrifice of your Son  
brought us healing and peace.  
Amen.  
— from *The Roman Missal*