

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We are more than halfway into our Lenten journey and hopefully you have participated in some or all of the different events or activities that were offered for our spiritual nourishment and renewal. We began on Ash Wednesday receiving the ashes on our foreheads symbolizing repentance; Stations of the Cross on Fridays; Tuesday Soup Suppers; Reconciliation offered on Tuesdays and Saturdays; Laetare ["Rejoicing"] Sunday on March 31; Parish Mission on April 2; and this weekend, we hope you were able to attend the Passion [Play] Cantata Concert on Saturday. We look forward to the Chrism Mass on Thursday, April 11 at St. Mary's Cathedral and finally Holy Week starting on Palm Sunday (April 14).

In our gospel for this Sunday, the Scribes and the Pharisees brought to Jesus a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. St. John writes that they wanted to "test" Jesus on the issue of retribution so "they might have some charge to bring against him". The Gospel accounts frequently describe how Jesus had to face unjust accusations made by these Pharisees, the ruling elders of Israel. They were upset, due to jealousy and envy, with Jesus' teaching and they wanted to discredit him in any way they could. They wanted not only to silence him, but to get rid of him because of his claim to speak with God's authority. There were many incidents where they planned to set-up Jesus to test and trap him like in an issue with paying taxes, but Jesus is smarter than them.

The incident happened while Jesus was preaching, when suddenly, there was a rude interruption. The Scribes and the Pharisees broke into the assembly, bringing a captive woman. They were demanding a condemnatory judgement from Jesus. But the Lord said nothing. The inquisitors continued to press him for a verbal response. It was at this point that he made the statement: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone." Jewish law treated adultery as a serious crime, one of the three gravest sins punishable by death. If Jesus said the woman must be pardoned, he would be accused of breaking the law of Moses. If he said the woman must be stoned, he would lose his reputation for being the merciful friend of sinners.

It is obvious that the Scribes and Pharisees were not the least bit interested in seeing true justice executed. Had they been in pursuit of justice, they would have taken the woman to the appropriate authorities for remedy. What did Jesus of Nazareth have to do with such legal affairs? Nothing at all. This was a trap laid for Christ. There's a malicious intent here! So, Jesus initially did a non-verbal response by writing something on the ground. Whatever Christ wrote on the ground made a powerful impact upon his critics. Silently they slipped away into the shadows, progressing from the old to the young. This effect usually is interpreted as an indication that the Lord's written message impacted the more mature first, and then the younger. It is hard to focus upon another's sin when your own is exposed. Perhaps Jesus was writing down a list of the sins of the accusers standing before him. Jesus now turns the challenge towards his accusers. The Lord leaves the matter to their own consciences.

The accusers abandoned their prey. They were no match for the Son of God. The Lord arose and spoke to the woman. He inquired: "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" Then he added: "Neither do I condemn you." Jesus both expresses mercy and he strongly exhorts her to not sin again.

Pope Francis was once asked what he will do to people, lay or clergy who have homosexual orientation, and his response was "Who am I to Judge?" St. Luke 6:37, exhorts us: "Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven". We are expected to be forgiving people as we ourselves have been forgiven.

Lent is a time for us to be given another chance to repent and to try our best to sin no more. God's grace enables us to confront our sin for what it is, and to turn back to Him with a repentant heart and a thankful spirit for His mercy and forgiveness. The Scribes wished to condemn, while Jesus wished to forgive and to restore the sinner to health. His challenge to the woman involved a choice - go back to her sinful living or accept God's forgiveness and offer of restoration and new life in his kingdom of peace and righteousness. St. Paul taught that there is none righteous, no not one (ROM 3:10). That included himself. He sometimes found himself doing wrong (ROM 7:15). He had to fight to keep himself under the Lord's control (1 COR 9:26-27). He knew that so long as he remained in the flesh, he would never achieve a permanent plateau of perfection (Philippians 3:12).

As we always say, "No one is perfect" and so we need to be careful when we pass judgment on others. There is a secular saying: "Remember, when you point a finger at someone, there are three more fingers pointing back at you".

~Fr. Ted Magpayo, Parochial Vicar