



March 21, 2010 The Fifth Sunday of Lent

“Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin any more.” Jn 8:11

Dear Friends;

Some time ago someone sent me a forwarded e-mail message. It had a picture of a hand pointing. You noticed the pointing finger but also you noticed the other three fingers curled back into the palm of the hand. The message with the picture read, “When you point at others you have three fingers pointing back at you.”

Today’s Gospel reading would concur with that sentiment. The scribes and the Pharisees in this story bring a woman caught in adultery forward. One can see the patriarchy of this culture at work. Where is the guy with whom she committed adultery? Women are portrayed as fonts of evil in order to trap men. So it is the woman who will bear the penalty of the violation—the guy gets away with it.

They place her in the middle to condemn her, not because they care about her or her sin. They want to use this as an opportunity to get Jesus so they could condemn him. (They are jealous of him and do not like his teachings.) If Jesus says “what’s the big deal?” then they can condemn him for not upholding the Law of Moses. Jesus is no fool and knows their cynical game. So he turns the tables on them.

Jesus places them in the middle of the circle of judgment when he says “Let the first one without sin cast the first stone.” Jesus is indicating that they have three fingers pointing back to themselves. They are trapped and condemned by their own self-righteous obsession with sin.

We live in times when we have lost sight of our own fallibility. We do not want to face our own weakness and culpabilities. So we project our own self-loathing onto others who we would like to blame for all the world’s problems. We point to gays, abortion, immigrants, liberals, fundamentalists, conservatives, Islam or any number of other convenient scapegoats. We demonize the other.

In scape-goating we condemn ourselves. We fail to take responsibility for our part in the failures of society and the world. We do not look at our own corrupt and self-serving behavior. How often do we put ourselves under the microscope?

It is extremely sad that we as Catholics have lost the value we used to place on the Sacrament of Confession. Yes in the past it could become neurotic. However in a healthy sense it made us face the reality of our own limits and made us take responsibility for the things that were not perfect in our lives. Not so that we could wallow in self-loathing but rather that we could be liberated and hear Jesus say, “Neither do I condemn you, from now on sin no more.”

As long as we do not accept responsibility for our own sins; we will continue to look to condemn others. We are running from ourselves, the truth and the merciful love of God. And we will not know peace. This season of Lent is our time to lay claim to our **own sins** and God’s mercy.

Peace,

Fr. Ron