

Neither Do I Condemn You

Dear friends in Christ,

Today's gospel reading continues to point us in the direction of God's inexhaustible mercy and forgiveness. Last Sunday's gospel about the Prodigal Son was a prime example of God waiting for us with his mercy. Today, we read about a woman caught in adultery.

The scribes and Pharisees wanted to entrap Jesus. Jesus avoids the trap, however, by offering an answer that was not anticipated by those who posed the question. Jesus, after writing on the ground with his finger, addresses those who stand before him and suggests that the one without sin cast the first stone.

Imagine what was going on in the scene as the Pharisees and the elders disperse, one by one. Jesus has eluded the trap they had prepared. But I also give some credit to the elders and the Pharisees who do not, in the end, claim to be sinless and worthy of passing judgment.

Left alone with the woman, Jesus asks where the accusers have gone. With no one remaining to condemn the woman, Jesus sends the woman on her way, refusing to pass judgment on her and exhorting her to avoid future sin.

Today's gospel is a classical example that our loving God does not condemn people but wants them to live, though they need to repent if they are to do so. It is heartwarming and comforting that Jesus, the rightful person to cast the first stone – for he is the only one without sin – rather than casting a stone, extended God's mercy to her and called her to conversion. In so doing, Jesus restored her human dignity and restored her to society by saving her life.

As human beings, it is often easy for us to throw the first stone. It is so easy to point accusing finger, fish out the faults of others and pass judgment. Remember the words of Jesus: "Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone."

Notice Jesus' last words to the woman, "Go, and from now do not sin anymore." Although Jesus forgave her sin, he expected her to live a life of grace and union with God from then on by not sinning anymore. Remember, Jesus was not dismissive of sin because sin does matter and damages our relationship with God. So Jesus says, "Go and from now do not sin anymore." When we receive God's forgiveness, he expects us to live as new people afterwards. That is precisely the attitude with which we are to come to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It would make no sense to come to confess our sins if we intended to continue committing the same sins again. In weakness we may commit the same sin again, but as we come to confession if we do not intend to amend our lives then surely we cannot say that we are truly sorry for our sins. Surely, we can only genuinely say that we are truly sorry for our sins if we have a firm intention not to commit them again.

This week we have our parish Lenten Penance Services at St. John's and Holy Trinity. Two priests will be available for confessions at Holy Trinity. Use this opportunity to experience God's merciful embrace. Jesus is waiting for you in the confessional with those words: "Neither do I condemn you."

May God's mercy transform your lives.

--Fr. Anthony Ahamefule