

HOMILY for 5th SUNDAY of LENT – Year C

In this Sunday's Gospel, Jesus said that let anyone without sin be the first to cast the stone at the sinful woman. Reflecting on that, I'm reminded of this cute story that I'd like to share with you.

Jesus was walking through the streets in the Holy Land one day, & He noticed a group of people throwing stones at an adulteress. He stopped & said to the crowd, "Let the one who is without sin cast the first stone at this woman." All of a sudden, a big stone came out of the crowd & hit the sinful woman right on the head. Jesus stopped, taken aback, then looked up & said, "Mom...!"

Anyway, Mary the Mother of our Lord might be the only human being who is without sin; but, the rest of the world is. Last Sunday, with the classic story of the Prodigal Son, we were reminded to ask God for forgiveness & then forgive other sinners as we learn to welcome them back to the fold. It is certainly not easy for us to do that as we have seen how the older brother refused to come inside of the house & celebrate the conversion of his younger brother with his compassionate & forgiving father. That is why we have seen infighting & division continue to happen in families & communities around the world. Our Church, for example, has all sorts of divisions that have failed to be reconciled despite countless effort of many peacemakers & unifiers to work on them over the years. That kind of infighting could also be seen in our country, the Mideast, & other regions around the world every day. Needless to say, we will not see forgiving & reconciliation happen in our Church, country, & world anytime soon.

If it is already tough for people to forgive & reconcile with God & one another, it would surely be more difficult for them to stop judging & condemning. For we humans like to pass judgments on others & enjoy feeling morally superior over their neighbors. We forget that human beings are all sinners. The only one who would qualify to judge & condemn the whole world is God. Other than that, no human being should judge & condemn another person. In case we have any doubt about that, Jesus tells us the story of a sinful woman brought to Him by the scribes & Pharisees in this Sunday's Gospel. Here is how the story was reported, "...The scribes & the Pharisees led a woman forward who had been caught in adultery. They made her stand there in front of everyone, 'Teacher,' they said to Him, 'This woman has been caught in the act of adultery. In the Law, Moses ordered such women to be stoned. What do you have to say about the case?' ...Jesus straightened up & said to them, 'Let anyone among you who has no sin be the first to cast a stone at her.' ...Then, the audience drifted away one by one, beginning with the elders... Jesus finally straightened up again & said to her, 'Woman, where did they all disappear to? Has no one condemned you?' 'No one, sir,' she answered, 'Jesus said, 'Nor do I condemn you. You may go; but from now on, avoid this sin.'"

As you can see, people back then, especially religious leaders, did not hesitate to pass judgment on & condemn sinners such as the adulterous woman in this Sunday's Gospel. Instead of trying to help her find the way back to the fold, they all wanted to condemn her & stone her to death. Ironically, we never heard about the fate of the man who committed adultery with her. Jesus could side with the religious leaders to condemn & sentence her to death. But, he chose not to do that. Let's just think about that for a moment. We humans like to pass judgments on one another & destroy anyone that they do not like. Because it is always easier for them to do that than trying to convince someone to find the way home to God. Jesus

evidently chose a new approach to help the sinful woman be welcomed back to the fold. He allowed the mob to use its brutal treatment of stoning a sinner; but He demanded it to be free of sins to do it. The fact is that they were all sinners. Yet, they dared to condemn the sinful woman. In the end, Jesus was able to get the mob to admit its own sins & reluctantly forgive the sinful woman. He certainly wants us to do the same & learn to welcome sinners back to the fold instead of judging & condemning them. For it might take us a while to work with them to turn their lives around. By doing that, we give sinners a new life like Jesus did. Indeed, this Sunday's First Reading expresses that sentiment as the following, "...Remember not the events of the past, the things of long ago consider not; see, I am doing something new! Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? In the desert, I make a way; in the wasteland, rivers." As you can see, even the Lord wanted to turn the page for the people of God & bring them a refreshing new way of life after their conversion experience in the desert.

Finally, besides forcing the people back then to review their own sinful lives & forgive a sinful woman in today's Gospel, Jesus also revealed to us that he was not interested in condemning & punishing sinners. Rather, He always looked for various ways to help them convert & come home to God. In fact, God the Father would share the same approach toward sinners. Unfortunately, the Catholic Church & its leaders have not shared the same thinking & have kept setting up one rule after another to make it more difficult for sinners to come home to God. For example, we all know that at least half of Catholic marriages has ended up in divorce. Instead of finding more effective ways to help those Catholics do an annulment for their former marriages & be remarried in the Catholic Church, its leaders have not done so. An annulment nowadays could take at least a year to go through. Moreover, it might cost an applicant six thousand dollars or more to get it done. In my early years of priesthood, I helped a young couple to get remarried in the Catholic Church; but I learned that the young, non-Catholic groom had to pay several thousand dollars to get his first marriage annulled in some diocese down in Texas. Thankfully our Diocese has used part of its annual CSA Collection to pay for all the annulments & help people from avoiding the annulment process & getting remarried outside of the Catholic Church.

My dear brothers & sisters, we humans like to pass judgment on others & condemn sinners. But, this Sunday Jesus calls us to stop that wrongful thinking & harmful approach toward sinners. Instead, we should learn from Him & try to find various ways to bring sinners back home to God. We should leave the judging part to God & join the angels in Heaven to rejoice on seeing someone come back to God.