

St Pius & St Anthony Homily 5th Sunday Lent Year C

Today, there is Jesus teaching a-way (of course), and an approaching mob gets louder and louder and closer and closer to him, until it squares up or encircles him, dragging up and depositing on the ground in front of him a shamed and broken woman. They are publicly accusing her of adultery. They even bring to him the loaded gun of expected punishment they thirst for, quoting Mosaic law to Jesus. But they want Jesus to do the deed & pronounce judgement against her.

What is He going to do? As always, with every encounter with Jesus, it brings us in a little closer to his own heart. I wonder if He thought, “Oh good, I need an innocent, pure jury of peers for her. Who volunteers? Who has the spotless, impartial conscience to rule in this case, especially since it means death penalty?” Are there any takers? Not a word!

Because Jesus knows how lopsided this trial is-what a perversion of justice it is. John 8:6 says the whole scene is a test/trap for Jesus. What, are they putting Jesus on trial here? What is He on trial? This case isn't for serving justice, but only pushing some group's agenda! This whole 'entrapping' set-up reminds me that sometimes the 'strictest justice' and 'literally blinded law', can take us down some pretty tight lanes, almost creating new injustices. Have you ever been confronted with those unjust lose-lose propositions, where you realize 'Yes, I may be guilty of something, but not all that guilty as it looks. There's more to it.'

Here's one from me: I remember the first and only time I was caned- actually beaten with a stick in school- and it was so unjust and cruel. ***Really***, I didn't do anything. It was elementary school (and no, it was not a nun!). We were having a tornado drill and that meant 1) Open the windows, 2) file orderly into the hallway with a hard cover book and kneel head-down facing the wall with the book overhead. Well, teachers patrolled the center of the hallway and told everyone to keep silent. But that day, someone on my side of hall was talking or snickering, and I got the cane stick smacked onto my calves. I turned and said, “I am not talking”, to which the 7th grade teacher caned me again. “Be quiet. You are now. Stop talking” What, the injustice, of course, I am NOW, but I'm just standing up to abuse, protesting my innocence. Oh, No, he said, “I wasn't minding him, I was still talking!” That just wasn't right! I want to cross-question him because we had our noses stuck in the wall-he was shooting in the dark-he had no idea who it was talking. My point: it was a set-up; the fix was in. there was no justification for his public punishment. Well, our gospel portrays a similar mockery of justice by the mob's attack and singling out this woman to take the whole fall

for some man (again adultery takes two). They were making an example, as her judge jury and executioner. Until, Jesus gets involved.

Or another time that I was just stuck, crushed between two conflicting laws. Once when I was a teenager driving home in my dad's truck from work, yes I should have I slowed up more in the turn (especially going into a downhill turn with snow on the road). I started sliding, and would you believe right there at that street corner, the electric company planted a light pole. So I slammed into it. The light head fell down on to the hood-it was wild. But now what? Cold snowy night, and being late on a lonely road, what do I do? (I did see a light come on in the house, my headlights were facing, but they turned it back off, just as quickly as the turned it on). So, what do I do? We only lived about a block away so I drove home, proceeded immediately to look up the police department number and called it in. Guess what? I humbly confessed my fault and the dispatch officer says, "Well son, that is an arrestable offense, you fled the scene of an accident." I didn't say this, but thought, "*Flee? I came straight home to call you.* I also have a curfew to abide by, too." But, I simply said I am going right back there to meet your officer there. But my point is "Yes, I know I'm guilty, but I'm stuck in a set-up." The fix was in. I had to call, BUT I had to leave to call.

But back to the gospel, Jesus saw right through this mockery of a trial. Yes, he knows what Moses taught, and yes he knows woman is not innocent, but there is a lot more going on here. Mob street justice is no way to administer a fair judgement. Jesus reads all of our hearts, and sees this for what it is: nothing but a set-up. Likely, this mob is taking care of some powerful person's problem. Maybe he is instigating it from the crowd. Maybe the woman was going to talk about her lover, or heaven forbid what about this scenario? (I know it gets a little unsavory here) , but what if this woman had just discovered she was pregnant with some local power boss' child-someone connected big time to the Temple or to Herod, and she was threatening to expose the whole affair. Certainly, only Jesus knows the whole story, and that is all the more reason to trust his handling of the case. He knows she is not innocent, but he also knows the scales of justice here are slanted/ broken over on the side of the powerful elite. So he equalizes the judgement. Okay, He says, whoever hasn't sinned here, you lead the charge and 'Fire'. But, there is only silence. The crowd knows their own sins. They know on a different day, it could just as likely be them in that circle of mob rule. Again, Jesus is simply confronting an abuse of justice. He knows this is a catch-22 style trap. Yes, she is not innocent, but we don't have the complicit partner that completes

this as a crime (last I checked, adultery was a two person sin). So, Jesus mercifully calls her to avoid forever this sin again, forgiving her and calling her to make amends with the rest of her life. The unknown man here surely got a pass here, so she gets a pardon today.

Yet, isn't Jesus so wise and strategic about handling this cruel crowd. He takes a moment, bending down scribbling on the ground, to defuse, de-conflict the situation. Timeout! Most curiously, He starts writing in the dust. Don't we all want to know what he wrote on the ground? Didn't the men in the crowd? What did he write? Some have suggested he wrote the man partner's name (who just happened to be very powerful & prominent in the community). Or maybe he wrote an attendance list of everyone who had picked up rocks, just for later accountability to keep a record. Or he wrote everyone's name with a most recent sin of theirs to make them pause and reflect? Who would be second up, when it came to satisfying the blood hungry mob seeking all sins to be ruled against with rocks? Whatever he wrote, it caused them to think. And when he announced the judgement, "Whoever is without sin, step up and lead the stone throwing." They all reconsider, one by one slipping away, begging off their claim. They knew the injustice of mob bullying. And thank God. But it also leads us to ask, "Would we have been piling on to some poor pawn in such an angry mob?" We will all get another chance to ask this question of ourselves, when we get into Holy Week, and echo that other mad crowd who demands of Pilate that Jesus be crucified. But would we go along? It is humbling. But can't we easily see ourselves being set up and becoming the crowd's victim too. I think this story invites us to slow down our rash judgements especially in the impersonal setting of crowds-or in the smug safety behind a keypad before we jump all over condemning someone in social media. Again, it might just as well be you once. We do best ourselves, to follow the example of our humble and merciful savior. Let's examine our own hearts first, before presuming to judge another's soul. May the one without sin be the first to throw a stone? On any day, that pure one is Jesus, and He doesn't throw stones. He says, "Go in peace, be forgiven, and learn from this." And we can learn much from Him too.