

5th Monday of Lent “Court Room Drama”
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I love our first reading. Susanna would rather die than commit adultery and yet the two judges carry out their threat of falsely accusing her. The prophet Daniel comes to the rescue. In one of the best court room dramas in the Bible, Daniel cross examines both judges and reveals to everyone gathered the two judges’ treachery. In those days, however, if you were caught falsely accusing somebody you would receive the same punishment for the crime. Daniel therefore put his life on the line to defend Susanna. For Daniel, however, it was the right thing to do. In the end, of course, the two judges were found to be guilty and were promptly stoned to death. Susanna was vindicated.

This story matches very well with the Gospel reading today. It says the scribes and Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery and made her stand in the middle. They say to Jesus, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?”

The Gospel then says, “They said this to test him.” This is an important detail because the scribes and Pharisees were not there to defend the Law of Moses, they were there to trip Jesus up. If Jesus said, “yes kill her”, his Gospel of love and forgiveness would have no credibility. If Jesus said, “no let her go”, then Jesus would be caught defying the Law of Moses, and his claim to be a Rabbi worthy of following would be discredited. Unlike Susanna though, the woman caught in adultery was in fact guilty of adultery. Like Susanna, however, she was being used violently by men in authority for an unholy purpose, in this instance, to discredit Jesus. In another excellent court room drama, Jesus doesn’t seem concerned. He just keeps doodling away in the dirt like any of us would do when we are little bored with what is going on.

Jesus simply solves the whole matter with a single sentence, “Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” Silence, you could hear a pin drop. Jesus goes back to doodling in the sand. And they all went away one by one, beginning with the elders. I think this little detail, that they left beginning with the elders, could be a direct reference to the story in Daniel. These elders, in a sense, learned their lesson from what happened to the two judges when they falsely accused Susanna. If the penalty for the woman caught in adultery is death, does any one of them wish to risk the penalty God might inflict on them if they carried through with their bloody plan? This is why, in the Gospel story, everyone dropped their rocks and left. This is also why Jesus eventually stopped doodling, straightened up, and asked her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” She replied, “No one sir.” Then Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you.” This is a remarkable and shocking statement. Daniel put his life on the line for an innocent woman. Jesus put his life on the line for a guilty one. Jesus blesses her and tells her to “Go, and from now on do not sin anymore.”

And so my friends, we would be well served to ask ourselves this question: How am I called to be like Jesus in our Gospel reading? How am I called to do the right thing, even if this means taking on a measure of risk, even if this means a certain measure of suffering? It is worthwhile reflecting what this might mean for us today with the situations we might be confronted with say among our family members or coworkers perhaps. However, the best question might be: How are we all like this woman caught in adultery? What are the sins in our lives that have us justifiably pinned to the wall awaiting the first stone to hit? In these moments, can we welcome Jesus into our hearts through our prayers, or the sacrament of reconciliation when this is possible again, or until such time simply an act of contrition? Can we accept Jesus' outstretched hand? Can we hear Jesus ask us, "Has no one condemned you?" Because of his passion and resurrection we can rightly say, "No one Lord, thanks to you." And Jesus might actually say something that is shockingly wonderful, "Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on, sin no more."