



FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

Year C

Isaiah 43:16-21

Psalms 126:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 6

Phillipians 3:8-14

John 8:1-11

Gathering

(An unlit candle, a bible opened to this week's gospel, a dinner plate spread with sand, and a couple of large hand-sized stones rest on the table covered with purple cloth. Some squiggly lines are drawn into the sand.)

This week Jesus is tested by the scribes and Pharisees who bring a woman caught in the act of adultery to him. Jesus shows compassion and mercy. Last week, we reflected on the overwhelming mercy God has for us in the parable of the prodigal son. How much compassion did you show this past week to those around you?

Prayer

(The candle is lit. The leader invites members to be attentive to God's presence. After a time of quiet, the prayer continues as follows.)

Leader. Let us count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ, our Lord, that we may gain Christ, be found in him, know him and the power of his resurrection.

All: Amen.

Adapted from Phillipians 3:8-10

(Members join in singing a Lenten themed song.)

HEARING THE LORD'S GOSPEL

(The scriptures are proclaimed aloud with a pause after each reading. Following a pause after the proclamation of the gospel, the leader invites members to name a word or phrase from the gospel that stays with them, but without any additional comment. Some may repeat what another has already said.)

When this naming is complete, the leader passes out copies of the scriptures of the week as needed. Pausing between them, the leader then poses these two questions: "What draws you to this gospel?" "Where do you resist this gospel?" The community pauses for a time of silent reflection. After about a minute, the leader invites members to consider the Reflection and Questions for the week. After a time for silent reflection, the leader invites members to re-arrange themselves in groups of three or four for sharing. The small groups move off so as not to intrude on one another.)

Reflection

It is rightly said that people's judgment of others often says more about themselves than about the person being judged. In the gospel, a woman accused of adultery is brought to Jesus by the scribes and Pharisees. They want Jesus to judge and condemn her. Instead of judging her, however, Jesus shows compassion and mercy towards her.

At the beginning of the story, Jesus twists things on the scribes and Pharisees and invites them to act on the judgment they have already made about the woman. The scribes and Pharisees do not act on their condemnation of the woman out of compassion or mercy. Rather, they do so because it would have brought on their own self-condemnation. Similarly, when we judge and condemn others, we sow the seeds for our own self-condemnation. As it says in Luke, "Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned" (Luke 6:37).

In judging and condemning others we manifest our own self-insecurity.

This insecurity stems from not being grounded in the love God has for us. The more secure I am in the love God has for me, the less inclined I am to judge others. Mother Teresa of Calcutta put it this way: “If you judge people, you have no time to love them.” And if you do not love people, is it, perhaps, because you are judging them?

Questions for Reflection and Conversation

- ◆ How ready are you to judge and condemn?
- ◆ How is the mercy and compassion God has for you reflected in the compassion and mercy you have towards others?
- ◆ Recall a time when you resisted judging another even though he/she might have seemed to deserve condemnation?
- ◆ How secure are you in the love God has for you?

HEARING THE GOSPEL’S LORD

(After about fifteen minutes of sharing in threes/fours, the leader re-gathers the community. Once back together, members pause for a moment. The leader then poses these questions: “What do you hear Christ saying to us in hearing and sharing his word?” “What do you want to hold on to for yourself from this session?” “How are you/we being called to live in response to God’s word?” After a pause, the leader invites the community to a time of conversation. When this sharing is complete, the community moves to a time of prayer.)

Response in Action Suggestions

Visit a nursing home in your area. Ask to be directed to someone who seldom has visitors. Introduce yourself and make a new friend. Persevere in visiting the person.

Plan to launch a Can-a-Week Campaign in your parish. This project serves to encourage parishioners to bring can of food to their weekend Mass. At a suitable time this food is brought to a nearby food pantry or shelter.

Set aside ten minutes each day this week for reflection and prayer. Search your heart for whom and why you judge. Pray for those whom you judge.

Prayer

(After a brief pause, the gospel or a portion of it, either of the other readings as appropriate or the responsorial psalm are proclaimed. The idea is to select a text that lends itself to inviting members to the time of silent prayer that follows. Following the proclamation, the leader poses these questions to the members: “What does Christ in his Spirit say to you now?” “What do you say to him in response?” The community pauses for a full five minutes of prayerful attention to God. A brief instrumental selection may be played during part of this time. After this time of silence, the leader invites members simply to mention a word or two, or a brief expression that captures what they hear Christ saying to them personally. The community receives this without additional comment.

Following this sharing, the prayer concludes as follows.)

All: Who am I to judge my neighbor?

Leader: Do not speak evil against one another, brothers and sisters. Whoever speaks evil against another or judges another, speaks evil against the law and judges the law.

All: Who am I to judge my neighbor?

Leader: But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is one lawgiver and judge who is able to save and to destroy.

All: Who am I to judge my neighbor?

Adapted from James 4:11-12

(Members join hands to pray the Lord’s Prayer. The session concludes with the exchange of a sign of peace.)