

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, March 13, 2016

The Fifth Sunday of Lent

This email, entitled Looking to Sunday®, focuses on one or more of the scripture readings for the coming Sunday. It prepares readers to hear God's Word at Mass and it offers a point of reflection to consider in the days leading to Sunday. Looking to Sunday is written by Father Tom Iwanowski.

WHO AM I TO JUDGE?

"Who am I to judge?" Those five words spoken by Pope Francis in July of 2013 are among the most remembered and quoted words of the Holy Father. Those words were part of his reply to a reporter's question dealing with homosexuality.

Those famous words of Pope Francis might come to mind as we listen to the Gospel reading for this coming Sunday. (John 8:1-11).

There we hear how a group of scribes and Pharisees drag a woman before Jesus as he is teaching in the area of the Temple. They breathlessly declare, "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?"

Those scribes and Pharisees were interested in his opinion because they believed they had ensnared Jesus in a trap.

If Jesus said the woman should be stoned, he would defy the authority of the occupying Romans who had forbidden the Jews to condemn anyone to death. But if Jesus said the woman should not be punished, he would disregard the Law of Moses. He would be accused of being an unfaithful Jew.

But Jesus refused to be drawn into the trap set by the scribes and Pharisees. He said, "Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." With those words, Jesus announced that whoever cast the first stone would be publicly declaring that he was sinless and perfect in the eyes of God. It was no surprise that everyone drifted away. Who is without sin?

We might surmise that in that situation Jesus might have used the words of Pope Francis, "Who am I to judge?" Who are you to judge this woman?

However, if we look carefully at that reading, we see that Jesus did judge. He obviously judged the Pharisees and scribes as being hypocritical, hostile, and insincere.

He also judged the woman. She was guilty of adultery. Even she did not deny the accusation brought against her.

But while Jesus judged the woman, he did not condemn her to be defined by her adultery. Instead he set her free that she might move beyond her sins. As Jesus told her, "Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin any more."

Jesus did not refrain from judging someone as doing wrong, but he did refrain from condemning people as lost and beyond God's mercy. Judging those who are worthy of condemnation belongs to God alone and not to us. Certainly Pope Francis proclaims that very message in this Year of Mercy.

