

*The eminent surgeon was walking through his local churchyard one day when he saw the grave digger having a rest and drinking a bottle of beer. 'Hey you!' called the surgeon, 'how dare you laze about and drink alcohol in the churchyard. Get on with your job or I'll complain to the vicar'. 'I should have thought you'd be the last person to complain', said the grave digger, 'bearing in mind all your blunders which I've had to cover up here in the graveyard!'*

The news these days seems to be saturated with people who are pointing the finger at rivals for all sorts of dubious motives. When we point the finger at anyone, without lifting a finger to help them, we're actually pointing three fingers at ourselves. There was a time when people were given the benefit of the doubt but that's becoming rarer. Many people hint at a smoking gun and when none is obvious they often invent one. The old maxim 'a person is innocent until proven guilty' is often turned on its head. It's so easy to jump on the bandwagon and condemn persons or institutions regardless of who gets hurt. And living in a compensation culture it's tempting to pin blame for monetary gain. Is this the plank Jesus is asking us to dislodge? When we do so removing the splinter from our brother's or sister's eye will be a breeze.

Did you know that the literal meaning of this word 'satan' is 'accuser'. In the Book of Revelation it says: 'he (Satan) accuses us day and night before our God'. When we become complicit in the blame game, he can find work for us and the plank in our eye gets bigger.

A couple of Sundays ago we heard in the gospel that 'love is always ready to excuse'. People can be labouring under all sorts of pressures when they make unwise decisions.

If you notice at the Last Supper Jesus never humiliated Judas' in the front of the other apostles even though he was up to no good. When he left the upper room they thought he was being sent to buy food -

they had no idea what he was up to and Jesus never told them. Jesus was silent when Herod mocked and insulted Him. When the Prodigal son turned his back on his frivolous past and returned home, his father didn't read out the riot act to him but reinstated him. The elder brother in the story who accused his younger sibling of messing up his life turned out to be the one 'with the plank in his eye'.

That doesn't at all mean we're gone soft on sin but we should be wise enough never to condemn the sinner with his sin no matter how shameful it appears on the surface. In the parable of the wheat and darnel, the landowner warned against weeding out the darnel prematurely, because the good wheat could be rooted out with it. That's the danger when we set about removing the splinter from our brother's eye.

*St Paul says: 'love is always ready to excuse, not accuse'. We leave the ultimate judgement to God who is infinitely just and merciful. He, and He alone can set the record straight.*