

Lent (5C)

Holy week will soon be here when we recount the events of the trial passion and death of Jesus. His trial, however, is not simply confined to the short period following his arrest in Gethsemane. It is going on in a protracted way long before that. We have a good example of it in today's story.

It appears that the scheming leaders use the woman's predicament to put Jesus to the test. I've heard it said that the opposite of love is not hate but using people for our own egotistical ends.

The Pharisees approach Jesus with a hidden agenda and he knows it. If he opts for leniency he'll be accused of rejecting the Mosaic Law but if he goes for stoning, he'll be labelled as being cruel and inhuman. Jesus confounds his opponents suggesting they take a long hard look at their own darker side.

Without doubt it is necessary to be a whistle-blower when institutionalised cover-up of wrongdoing has taken place. But when it comes to an individual who's had an allegation made against them people need to be extra careful not to use judgemental language. You hear people using the expression 'where there's smoke there's always fire' with little consideration for the reputation of the person involved who may well be completely innocent. During His interrogation before the Sanhedrin Jesus himself was falsely accused even though he had done absolutely nothing wrong. His trial was rigged – false witnesses were paid to give dodgy evidence.

The Scribes and Pharisees were not interested in the woman's good name. In exposing her sin they subject her to a kind of psychological abuse. Have we ever, like them, used the sins, or vulnerabilities of another to further our own egocentric agenda with scant regard for the person's good name?

Sadly I've heard of situations in a marriage breakup where the reputation of the estranged partner is blackened by their ex in front of their children making out they were exclusively the one hard done to. That's a kind of emotional abuse of children and should never happen. The Pharisees too were coming across as whiter than white until Jesus wrote out their sins in the dust with his finger. When they saw what he wrote you couldn't see them for dust.

Scripture notes that it is Satan, not Jesus, who 'accuses us day and night before our God.' Jesus points the finger at no one. On the contrary when we acknowledge our guilt and seek His forgiveness He comes to our defence, like he did for the woman in today' story.

In His sacred passion all the guilt and shame of our sins is transferred on to Him. Scripture says: 'He will take away his people's shame everywhere on earth'. The fingers pointed at the woman, who incidentally stands for all of us, will soon be pointed at Him – the innocent one.

I'm sure she was feeling mighty pleased when Jesus sent her accusers packing. The world would be a far better place if, instead of pointing the finger, we point people in the direction of Christ who is mercy incarnate.