

Lent 5C

Holy week will soon be here where 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 gospel.

It appears that the scheming leaders use the woman's predicament to put Jesus to the test. They were envious of his popularity with the ordinary people. So they approach Him with a hidden agenda. 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 wrong-foots them, however, by suggesting they take a long hard look at themselves.

This, in no way condones any supposed wrongdoing on the woman's part. Sometimes it is necessary to blow the whistle for the common good but we need to be scrupulously careful not to implicate people unjustly. Pope Francis, for instance, wasn't five minutes on the throne of Peter when some segments of the press were associating him with the notorious junta dictatorship of the 1970's which he flatly denied. During His interrogation before the Sanhedrin Jesus himself was falsely accused by people who were hell-bent on bringing him down.

The Scribes and Pharisees were not interested in the woman's welfare. In exposing her supposed sin they subject her to a kind of psychological abuse. Have we ever used the sins, or vulnerabilities of others to further our own misguided agenda regardless of the person's overall welfare?

Sadly I've heard of situations in a marriage breakup where the reputation of the estranged partner is sullied by the other party often in front of children or grandchildren with the sole aim of making themselves look good to the detriment of the disaffected partner. That's a sort of emotional manipulation of

the young. Much to the exasperation of Jesus, the Pharisees seem to be playing that game in today's gospel.

In not condemning the woman, Jesus inflames the hostility of the Jewish leaders towards him. The full force of their anger will soon be vented during his trial and coming passion. The Powers of Darkness are behind it. Scripture notes that it is Satan, not Jesus, who '*accuses us day and night before our God.*' Jesus doesn't point the finger at anyone. 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's incident.

In His sacred passion all the guilt and shame of our sins is transferred on to Him. The fingers pointed at the woman will soon be pointed at Him. As scripture notes "God has burdened Him with the sins of all of us" "ours were the sufferings he bore, ours were the sorrows he carried".

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 gloating over another's misery, we point people in the direction of Christ who is mercy and love incarnate.