

Good, Clean, and Holy

There is a part of us that feels we need to judge others.

We are quick to put labels on people who are not like us - most of the times we do it as a way of recognizing how they are different from us. Sometimes it's complimentary ... that person is smart, hard-working, athletic, gifted, rich, or holy

Sometimes it's derogatory ... that person is a foreigner, jew, alcoholic, gay, divorced, ugly, or adulterer. You get the point. We are quick to label people and by putting a label on someone, we begin judging ... whether we know it or not.

Part of my ministry outside of Church is to go into the Waukesha County jail and hold a Bible study. John Waymel was the man who got me involved and he would always say ... if the same circumstances occurred in your life, that happened to the men inside the prison, you might very well be there too. We don't know their stories. They are men and women just like us who were dealt a series of circumstances and their choices resulted in jail time. And it's easy for us to feel superior, to sit in judgment, to cast stones - especially if we keep our sins hidden.

In the Gospel, they bring a woman before Jesus, She is caught in the act of adultery, She is guilty and the punishment is death. Those were different times back then but that's the way it was. They expect they have trapped Jesus - he must answer life or death. If life, he must reject the law of Moses and if he says death - he is in conflict with the Roman empire who hold the right to inflict the death penalty - plus he rejects his own teaching of love and forgiveness - making him a hypocrite - who Jesus hates.

Instead - he bent down and began to write with his finger. It doesn't say what he wrote and no one knows for sure. It's just conjecture, only a guess ... but I heard it said that what Jesus wrote was different for everyone who read it. It named their darkest sin. As each person read it, they dropped their stone and walked away. When the bright light is cast upon our darkest sins, the power to judge becomes lifeless in our own hypocrisy. We are compelled to drop our stones and walk away.

And when everyone had left and it was only the woman standing alone with Jesus, he asked her if anyone condemned her and she answered no. And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you."

Go, and from now on do not sin anymore.”

Some people use this reading to tell us that there is no hell, that God condemns no one and we will all be welcome in heaven thanks to the abundant mercy and grace of Jesus Christ. Since no one is really worthy to get into heaven AND God loves us, we all get in! If we believe that ... if we believe there are no consequences for our actions ... on how we treat, label, and judge our fellow human beings ...

I gotta believe we are going to be in for the surprise of our eternal life.

Jesus does have abundant mercy and his mercy is far bigger than your worst sin. He IS the God of 2nd chances, 3rd chances, infinite chances. He loves you and wants you to be in heaven with Him and His Father - our Father. But we can't gloss over his final words. Go, and from now on, do not sin anymore.

That's like telling us to stop breathing, right. We are only humans, we are inclined to sin, to give in to temptation, to treat others worse than we would ourselves, to turn from God. It's a constant battle despite our best intentions. We do have a remedy.

We are offered the gift of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. I teach 4th graders LFF (CCD for those who grew up in that era) and we were talking about reconciliation last week. And there are three insights I would like to share. First, some said they either don't go or rarely go to Reconciliation ... second, it's still relatively new and scary for them. Remember they received the Sacrament little over two years ago. The final comment was when they did go, they felt good, clean - even holy. Parents, this is a golden opportunity. If you aren't going as a family you are missing a chance for your children to feel good, clean and holy. By your example, you walk and live your faith and you set the example for your children.

Now many adults don't go to Reconciliation and for many, the same three insights apply. As part of our faith - the Church has set aside 5 precepts that we are to follow. Each of these precepts of the Catholic Church is a requirement. Together with the Ten Commandments, they represent the minimum level of moral living. Intentional violation of the precepts or the Commandments is a *grave matter*, meaning a mortal sin.

For those who don't remember or never heard of them, let me quickly list them for you

- You shall attend Mass on Sundays and on holy days of obligation
- You shall confess your sins at least once a year.

- You shall receive Holy Communion at least during the Easter season.
- You shall observe the days of fasting and abstinence established by the Church.
- You shall help to provide for the needs of the Church.

Each one is worthy of discussion but let's just talk about the second - confess your sins once a year. No one is guaranteed a free pass into heaven but we are all given a chance to get a clean slate - to start fresh - a do-over whenever we visit the priest in Reconciliation. Some will say they are covered by the Penitential Rite at the beginning of Mass and don't need to go. The Rite during Mass is NOT the Sacrament of Reconciliation. You may receive absolution from venial sins but not mortal sins. You may be confused what is mortal and what is venial. For a sin to be a mortal sin - you have to know it is wrong AND you do it anyway AND if the sin is a grave matter. I think we can all understand the first two parts but sometimes we don't know whether it's grave or not. And that is why we go to the Priest. He can help you with that and he can absolve you of mortal sins. The Rite at Mass cannot.

The second insight - even adults are afraid to confess their sins in person - even to a priest. Often it has been such a long time, we don't know where to begin. Our priests are kind and understanding, they will walk you through it, they will help you make a good confession. You owe it to yourself and your God to go

Finally - we feel good, clean and holy. That's true whenever we make an honest confession - even for adults.

We begin by going. This is Lent, This is a time of repentance and conversion. If you haven't gone in the last year - now is a very good time - either on your own or better yet, as a family, But go. Each time we go, the goal is to sin less - ultimately to not sin anymore.

St Dominic offers Reconciliation on Saturdays from 2-4 PM or by appointment. This Wednesday, April 10th, as part of the Archdiocese 175th Anniversary Sacrament Event, priests from our parish and surrounding parishes will offer the Sacrament of Reconciliation for 12 hours between 8 am to 8 pm. St Dominic was selected as one of ten sites to offer this event. Stop in and leave with a clean slate.

In conclusion, No one is without sin. St. Padre Pio said, "Even if a room is very clean and the door is closed ... the dust will collect there and it will require cleaning." We have

been given the remedy - the Sacrament of Reconciliation. No one should be casting stones or labeling our neighbor. Jesus knows our sins and if you look closely, they may be written in the dirt for you to see.

And if there is any label to attach - let us call ourselves good, clean and holy.