

Fr. Drummond's Homily

6th September 2020

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

“Who are you to judge,” or “You're judging me” are both variations of the same last ditch defense of sinful behaviour. Also popular along this line is Matthew 7:1 – “Judge not lest you be judged.” Most people who invoke Matthew 7:1 have no idea of the Book, Chapter or Verse, they only vaguely know that it comes from the Bible. And, of course, they have no idea that the following line says, “With that judgement you judge you shall be judged and with what measure you mete out, it shall be measured to you again.” So when read in its fullness we see that what initially seems to be an injunction against judging is in fact a caution to judge rightly. If we judge in justice, truth, and charity, we can expect the same.

Today's readings are all about the need to judge and to judge with justice, truth, and charity. Ezekiel, whose name means “the strength of God,” is a prophet of the Exile. In today's reading, God names him watchman for the house of Israel. As such Ezekiel is responsible for pointing out to sinners the error of their ways. I can imagine a scenario in which the prophet points out to a person that he is living a sinful life and when he gets the response “You're judging me,” and he thunders in reply, “Yes, and be glad it's me judging you rather than God for you still have a chance to change your life and be saved.” For the Scripture very clearly states, “If you warn the wicked and he refuses to turn from his way, he shall die for his guilt, but you shall save yourself.” If we ourselves would live virtuous lives, we have a responsibility to caution others to live lives of virtue as well.

In our second reading from St. Paul's Letter to the Romans we read that love is the fulfillment of the Law and that all the Commandments may be summed up as “Diliges proximum tuum sicut teipsum – Love your neighbour as yourself.” When listing the Commandments which are summed up in this final injunction, St. Paul starts with “You shall not commit adultery” which comes even before “You shall not kill.” Now those who want to get away with as much as possible will seek to define adultery in the narrowest possible sense but that is mistaken – it needs to be defined in the widest possible sense and for that reason comes first – in order to be able to fulfill the ultimate Commandment of Love, we need purity. In defining the sins listed in the Commandments, we need to paint with the broadest brush possible. Thus adultery is *any* sexual act outside of marriage between a man

and a woman and that is not open to the transmission of life. For a couple to live together as man and wife *before* marriage is gravely sinful. For two persons of the same gender to have a sexual relationship is gravely sinful. The taking of life in the womb is gravely sinful. And it is no act of Love on our part to say otherwise; indeed, the truly loving thing is to point that out.

In today's Gospel Jesus tells us to first act discretely as first, "If your brother sins against you go tell him his fault between you and him alone." *Then* if he does not listen to first bring in others, and if he still refuses to listen, to involve the Church. At this point Jesus repeats almost verbatim what he spoke to Simon Peter in Matthew 16:19 (our Gospel from two weeks ago): "Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." In our Gospel from two weeks ago our Lord was speaking exclusively to Peter but in today's Gospel He is addressing the institutional Church. The Church has the power to bind and to loose. If this sounds a lot like judging: well yes, it is judging. What is important is that the judgement is made in *charity*, and with the hope of eventual correction and thus salvation. There should never be a sense of schadenfreude or satisfaction in the judgement of binding, "You're gonna burn!" But rather there should always be the hope for eventual salvation. Traditionally the imposition of the sentence of capital punishment always ended with the words, "And may God have mercy on your soul." The salvation of the soul is what in the end all earthly judgement should be about.

What this means for each and every one of us is that we should first and foremost seek to live our own lives in conformity with God's Holy Commandments. Secondly, that we accept the definitive Teachings of the Church on Faith and Morals without trying to parce them, adapt them to the times, or reinterpret them. And most challenging is that we voice judgement to those given over to our care, but that we do so in a true spirit of charity and conversion rather than condemnation. No matter how great the sin – and we are never to compromise with that – we are always called to love the sinner. Ultimately, that means hoping and praying for their salvation.