

**The Collect.**

O GOD, the protector of all that trust in thee, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy; Increase and multiply upon us thy mercy; that, thou being our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we finally lose not the things eternal. Grant this, O heavenly Father, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

**The Epistle. Romans 8:18-23**

I RECKON that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.

**The Gospel. St. Luke 6:36-42**

BE ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven: give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again. And he spake a parable unto them, Can the blind lead the blind? shall they not both fall into the ditch? The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Either how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother's eye.

## *I Know You*

This morning I want to speak about our difficult Gospel passage, which says some hard things about judging. And following Peter Lombard, an early Medieval theologian, I think that that it is important to consider difficult Biblical ideas by juxtapositioning seemingly contradictory passages together to try to understand how they resolve. And this method also illuminates the sometimes perplexing transition from the Old Testament to the New Testament. The Old Testament sees God himself delegating his judgment to the sons of men. And as soon as they enter the Promised Land, judges are set up in all the tribes. But in the New Testament God takes almost all judgement *out* of the hand of the people and places it all in the hands of the Son of God – the man Jesus Christ.

Indeed, in one place Jesus says that all judgment has been committed to the Son,<sup>1</sup> and yet, curiously, when two brothers approach him in a dispute about their inheritance he says: *Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?*<sup>2</sup> These pairs are very common in the New Testament – especially the teachings of Jesus. So common in fact, that we should begin to suspect that this is not a problem so much as it is a divine teaching opportunity for us.

For example, in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus says: Judge not. But then he invites the Sanhedrin to judge him: *Which of you convinceth me of sin?* And he invites them also to judge the times: *Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth; but how is it that ye do not discern this time? Yea, and why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?*<sup>3</sup>

Likewise the woman taken in adultery, Jesus' objection was not in judging per se, but in the act of unjust, hypocritical judging. Jesus says: 'Go ahead, everyone who is without sin - judge this woman.' St. Paul invokes this same principle of gross hypocrisy when he says: *Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things.*<sup>4</sup>

The problem with judging is that we always do it to someone else but not ourselves. The Golden Rule is that we must do unto others what we would want them to do for us. Let me propose a Silver Rule: 'Don't judge others; judge yourself.' In fact, invite others to judge you – especially those who love you – your Christian family – your Church. The problem with judging others is not only that it is very damaging to our own souls - but also, it is a social game that we can't win.

If we are constantly playing the game of judging others, we will eventually end in debtors' prison ourselves, debtors not only to the expectations and judgements of others, but debtors to the entire range of judgements by which we have constantly been condemning others. So that's why we pray, forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

If we do not forgive our debtors, the New Testament says that the result is catastrophic: *So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.*<sup>5</sup> We court disaster for our souls because if we do not accept the basis of forgiveness for other men; that is, that through Christ's blood, his sins have been completely taken away, then how can we invoke Christ's forgiveness for our own sins? If we judge others but not our own selves, then

we have invented a special case of “limited atonement” where Christ’s forgiveness applies to us, but not to others.

And besides this, if we judge others, we immediately place ourselves back under the law. And we don’t want to be there. The law is merciless. The law will judge us. Though we have spent our whole lives condemning others, the Law won’t care one bit. The law will not be deterred. The law will come for us. And condemn us in the final judgment.

But let’s talk now about how judging can be helpful. We cannot help seeing faults in others. That’s not the sinning part. I think that other people - their failures - their sins - these are *mirrors* for our own souls. As long as we are consciously involved in trying to know ourselves - as Socrates says, and as the Bible says - we will see everyone of these faults in others as a window into our own souls. And this is especially true when we realize that God is bringing people with special kinds of faults into our lives for a reason. God is constantly trying to show us who we are. I think that we should pay very close attention.

Remember that God used Nathan the prophet to illuminate the utter depravity and deceit that still lived in David’s soul. David was the friend of God. In him God delighted. God loved him. And God loves our soul too, just as he did David and on the same basis. Because there is gross sin still living in us too.

So Nathan will come to us too, by and by. As the Scripture says: *For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.* Our culture may not believe in corporal punishment anymore, but God has always believed in it. Because as far as God is concerned: *if he does not chasten us, we are illegitimate children, and not sons.*

These are hard words - to “scourge” is to be whipped, just as Pilate did to Jesus. But how can scourging be part of God’s relationship with us? I thought we were forgiven? Why scourge us for something for which we are forgiven? Because our forgiveness is just the beginning. As soon as we are forgiven, God immediately begins to purge out the gross sin that still lives deep within our souls - like David - and He helps us to keep ourselves from returning to the very same sins for which we have been forgiven. Our conversion is just the beginning of our transforming relationship with God.

The Bible calls this spiritual transformation process “sanctification.” Sanctification means the process of taking a child of this world and transforming us, inwardly, into a child of God. And I see 7 distinct parts of this transformation process: 1) getting to know God - his acts, his attributes 2) getting to know ourselves, as all the great prophets have said that we must do 3) understanding the corruption that still lives in our souls, as Jeremiah warned us 4) co-laboring with God to cast out those demons which are facilitators of this corruption 5) understanding the fatal flaws of character by which these demons of debauchery, destruction and deceit have entered into our soul in the first place 6) training our souls through God’s penance by prayer and fasting to seal up those portals through which the devil seeks to devour us and finally 7) to consciously rest in the peace and joy of our salvation, which brings glory and joy to the heart of God himself.

To know ourselves, is to judge ourselves. As St. Paul says: *if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged* and none of this complicated process of sanctification would be required. But of course, we cannot judge ourselves. God must do it. And remember, the whole point of God judging us is for our eternal redemption: *But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.*<sup>6</sup>

Some people come to Church out of pure habit. Many people come to church because the church service gives them good experiences. They don't learn anything about God or about themselves, but they do seem to feel better when they leave. Some still come to Church for the social benefits. This has become less and less true in the modern age, in which Church and Christianity has become more and more despised in our culture.

Habit, good experiences, social expectations. These are not good reasons for coming to Church. Especially in the light of why the New Testament says we should. Because if it is the transformation of our souls that we are after, so that we can be holy, just and pure and to please God, then the reason that we come to Church is that we want to associate ourselves with others who are trying to do the very same thing. And this is not just a good idea, this is a commandment of the Lord: *Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.*

Even Dante went through purgatory with a guide. His name was Virgil, the great Roman poet, author of the Aeneid, the Roman counterpart to Homer's Iliad and Odyssey. The Church is our guide, because the Church is an assembly, an ecclesia, of souls that have been called out of Hell to make the slow and arduous journey to Heaven. The New Testament is very clear about this. It is a hard journey. In fact, it is so hard, that it is impossible to make it alone. This is why we are given the indwelling Paraclete. But this is also why we are given society after human society to help us go through those ongoing, seven steps of transformation – from being a child of hell to being a child of God.

The society of parents. The society of our community. The society of our teachers. But most of all - the society of the Church. They all judge us kindly, that we might not be judged by God himself - directly. We come to the Church both because she is non-judgmental, but (ironically) because she has judgement. And that's primarily what we are trying to learn, isn't it? We are trying to learn how to judge right from wrong – not only in our outward actions, but in our inmost soul.

Ultimately, no one in the Church may judge us as individuals because Christ is the judge of the living and the dead. But one of the terrible truths of Christianity is that there will be a final judgment. No matter how much the wicked prosper now, no matter how much justice is perverted in the land now, no matter how hard the words of the proud and the blasphemer now, there will be a final judgment at the end of this age.

But by associating ourselves with the Church, by deliberately subjecting ourselves to the judgement and the discipline of the Church, and the transformation process of knowing God and knowing

ourselves throughout our lives by the power of the Holy Spirit, we will have nothing to fear from the final judgment. On the last day of this world, when heaven opens and the heavenly white horse bursts upon the theater of this world, for every eye to see, bearing him who is called Faithful and True - who will make war against all unrighteousness and will be the final judge of the souls of men, he will not look upon us in judgment. At all. He will look upon us in love. And He will say: "I know you." And we will say: "we know you too." - *Amen.*

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<sup>1</sup> John 5:22

<sup>2</sup> Luke 12:14

<sup>3</sup> Joh 8:46

<sup>4</sup> Ro 2:1

<sup>5</sup> Mathew 18:21-35

<sup>6</sup> 1 Co 11:32