

HOMILY 5TH SUN LENT YRC 2019

I think we are all familiar with the mob mentality. It describes how people can be influenced by their peers to adopt certain behaviors on a largely emotional, rather than a rational basis. There is a loss of self awareness and people are less likely to follow normal restraints and inhibitions. Violence is more likely to occur, largely because people feel that they cannot be held personally responsible for the actions of a group. I think that is what is going on in the Gospel reading today.

To understand this we have to look at what happened just before this reading. There was a division among the people regarding whether or not Jesus was the Messiah. There was a whole group of people who wanted to arrest Jesus right there because they did not believe that the Messiah could come from Galilee. Instead they went to the Pharisees who were threatened by Jesus and were already plotting to get rid of him. And now they have this mob that is already worked up. So they make a plan. They bring Jesus a woman caught in adultery and ask Jesus: "In the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. What do you say?" Now if he said: "stone her," he would be violating the Roman law as only the Romans could order and execution. If he said: "let her go," he would be violating the Law of Moses. So they had him either way. He could not win. And they had this angry mob with them. And Jesus applies his law of love and answers: "Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." Well they did not expect that. They are not going to be able to arrest him based upon that. And now what are they going to do with the woman caught in adultery? The Law of Moses says that the man and the woman should be stoned and that an eye witness must be brought forward to give testimony. They had not thought this through rationally. And Jesus breaks down this loss of self awareness and sense of personal responsibility. They have to look

at themselves and ask if they are without sin. I wonder how many people in the crowd were guilty of adultery and just had not been caught. They each come to their own conclusion that none of them should be judging her and leave one by one. Only Jesus remains and says: “Neither do I condemn you. Go and from now on do not sin anymore.” Jesus allows her to put the past in the past and gives her a chance to start over.

I think we frequently get caught up in this mob mentality and I think much of the time we are unaware of it. “Everybody is doing it so I cannot be help personally responsible.” I remember saying to my parents as a child: “everybody is doing it.” And their response was always: “if everyone was jumping of a bridge would you jump to?” In other words, “If everybody is doing something stupid or irrational or immoral, would you do it to?” Sometimes we just go along with what everyone is doing without thinking about it much. Some of the things we just go along with are not even rational. If we thought about it we would know that it is not the right thing to do. And if every time we were about to judge someone you remembered what Jesus said in the Gospel today: “Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her,” we would never judge anyone. That is the lesson today. We must take personal responsibility for our actions and it is not up to us to judge others.