

Justice 2: Holy Tears

‘Justice without mercy is cruelty.’ Thomas Aquinas

When St. John (JN 8:1-12) describes the Pharisees hauling the adulterous woman before Jesus in the hopes of exposing His inability to unite mercy and justice (Lev. 20:10), with whom do we identify?

Like me, you can probably admit that you are both prostitute and Pharisee. Many of us who come out of sexual disintegration have worked hard at coming clean and helping the Church clean house. Congratulations. We now are less tempted by unclean spirits and more inclined to religious ones. What else explains the shock we feel when a real sinner shows up in our midst?

God is faithful. Might we recognize in our Christian ‘enculturation’ a flash of the inner-Pharisee whose outrage over the gender meltdown in our day tempts us to look with disgust at the unidentified gender being before us? Have we forgotten the bullies who beat us up at school before we were LGBT-anything, just lost and alone in our uncentered selves? What about the religious who squinted through their smiles at us? The idiotic counsel from church men who punctuated their platitudes with ‘just don’t tell anyone...’?

It is good to forgive and also not to forget how tough it is for outliers to find footing among the holy ones. And if we do forget, just wait. God is merciful to bring up old struggles of the flesh just to remind us of how vulnerable we still are and how somehow, we need the saving love of Jesus more today than yesterday. Let the accusing voices roar. Let the demons howl and chase us right back to the feet of Jesus where our divided souls can find refuge from the stones and stony gaze of Pharisees. C.S. Lewis is right: ‘If religion does not make you an awful lot better, it can make you an awful lot worse.’

Maybe your sins are not sensual; you cannot relate to the prostitute. Then think about adultery as illicit virtue, not sex. Have you quietly begun to pat yourself on the back for your ordered life rather than to thank God for His mercy? Perhaps you spend more time praying for your holiness than for saving a tortured soul from the flames of hell. Many of us can confess honestly that we needed the disordered son or daughter or spouse or friend to rouse us from our self-centered faith and to cast ourselves once more on the saving love of Jesus.

The sweet, savory truth: Jesus is God’s justice for broken ones like us! And it takes a good break in order for us pilgrims to be made new by His mercy, a cleansing love which engulfs and transforms our injustices into something good.

All we have left is tears, evidence that we have lost our way, grown cold in the light, weary in well-doing, unmerciful. Tears are good. They show us that we still have hearts that can break. What better time to break than now as we walk with Jesus to Calvary? Maybe our broken hearts are

required to make room for persons who will perish unless they receive a share in His heart through ours.

'The fire of divine love, which burns on the altar of our hearts...miraculously turns itself into water, the compunction of tears, which purifies us from sin and commends our good works. When our works are sprinkled with tears, splendor shines upon us, and a ray of light radiates from our depths with a serenity of delightful brightness.' St. Peter Damian