

2019.04.07 Homily by Fr. Gabor

Just to put my homily into context it is important to know that long before Jesus came among us the Glory of the Lord (sometimes referred to as the 'Shekinah) left the Temple of Jerusalem and according to Jewish theology it dwelt on the Mount of Olives. The reason for leaving the temple was that the temple was dishonoured by the religious leaders of Israel.

How was it dishonoured? Today's Gospel story gives us an example. The scribes and Pharisees misused the Law of the Lord and used it to kill rather than bring people back to life with God. The catching of the adulterous woman and public condemnation was a clear example of that. God didn't give the Law and the Temple for this purpose.

The Law and the prophets, the temple, the Church and all the religious practices were given to bring humanity and God back together. The Law's demands are high, but only in the same way as a football coach's demands are high on his footballers. The Law is there to bring the best out of all of us and to direct us back to the path that leads to communion with God. However those who lose sight of this important purpose of the Law will inevitably use the Law in a cruel way, and will even convince themselves that they are acting for the sake of God. This is what we see in the Gospel reading. But this is not how God meant His Law to be used. As Jesus says in Matthew's Gospel the Law and the prophets all hang on the first commandment to love God with all our hearts and minds and strength and our neighbour as ourselves (cf. Mt 22:37-40), therefore the Law's purpose is to restore love between God and man and between fellow human beings, and not to kill or humiliate as soon as someone is caught out. God is merciful, especially in situations like this. St. Paul says in Romans 5:20 that where sin increased grace and mercy increased even more. Jesus' story last Sunday of the prodigal son reminds us how merciful the Father is and how deeply he desires that we come back to him, and therefore how merciful and receptive we also should be towards sinners. The prophet Ezekiel (in 18: 23) also tells us that the Lord does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that he turns back to Him and lives.

So why would the Pharisees misuse the Law of God in such horrible ways. They do so in order to exert their power and authority. This is what bugs Ezekiel and the great prophets and then later on Jesus as well (see Mt 23: 2-7).

However the prophecy of Ezekiel says that the Glory of the Lord (the shekinah) will return from the Mount of Olives to the Temple of Jerusalem. John in his Gospel wants us to see what it is like when the Glory of the Lord returns not only to the temple made of stones, but also to our bodies, which are the temple of the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 6:19). In Jesus we see the Glory of the Lord returning to His people. His response to the accusations of the scribes and Pharisees is: 'If there is one of you who has not sinned, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.' In the midst of the turmoil of accusations and fear the only words Jesus uses are words of Mercy. This is the glory of God where sin abounds. Of course His words also command humility for all present; the humility to accept their own sinfulness before they judge others.

We all do what the scribes and Pharisees do; we all judge and sometimes even wish the offender would die, instead of praying that they may return to God's way. This is not cheap grace, because remember Jesus also tells the adulterous woman: 'go away and don't sin anymore.'

Perhaps the only good thing we can learn from the scribes and the Pharisees is that they have just enough humility to stop challenging Jesus and quietly walk away acknowledging their own sinfulness.