

## GUILT BY ASSOCIATION?



Jesus is merciful to sinners. We are not Jesus; we are human and sinful; we are judgmental and opinionated, especially towards sinners.

We now know, from the instruction we have received during this Jubilee Year of Mercy, that “mercy is the fundamental law that dwells in the heart of every person who looks sincerely into the eyes of his brothers and sisters on the path of life.” (Pope Francis).

What does mercy look like? Mercy looks like letting go of anger, wrath, violence, and revenge, neither condemning nor judging.

Bishop Desmond Tutu observed that “we focus on the big – evil – events. We miss the little acts of love that bind us.” You have the Light of God within you; if

I can’t see that, that’s my problem. I can’t see the Light of God within you because of my anger and because of my disposition to judge.

When faced with the gravity of sin [the big, evil, event], God responds with the fullness of mercy. (Pope Francis)

We see God’s merciful response in the first reading: David sinned gravely by rejecting the LORD, doing evil in his sight, killing Uriah the Hittite and taking Uriah’s wife as his own. But then, David said to the prophet Nathan, “I have sinned against the LORD.” Nathan answered David: “The LORD on his part has forgiven your sin: you shall not die.”

God forgives. God is merciful. How often do we withhold our forgiveness when we have been wronged?

Even less forgiving, do we bristle at the sight of “sinners” in public, seemingly free from approbation, associating with others who are now rightfully tainted by association and thus deserving of our condemnation?

In the Gospel reading, Jesus dined with a Pharisee when a sinful woman appears, humbles herself, weeps, and anoints Jesus’s feet. The Pharisee said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would know who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, that she is a sinner.”

Jesus responded with mercy; he forgave her sins. The Pharisee, who has already condemned the sinful woman, now casts a judgmental light on Jesus.

We can take five lessons from these readings:

1. “[Jesus] urges each of us never stop at the surface of things, especially when we have a person before us. We are called ... to focus on the heart in order to see how much generosity everyone is capable of.” (Pope Francis)
2. Solidarity is lived not alone but with others, even those we may dislike.
3. To establish a culture of solidarity, we must build a culture of encounter and inclusion.
4. It is only through love that we transform others and ourselves.
5. The Light of God within us is not a judgmental light

(Readings for the 11<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time)



ARCHDIOCESE  
OF PORTLAND  
IN OREGON

Office of Life, Justice, & Peace