

Right and Wrong

First Sunday of Lent (Year A)

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Fr. Tony Davis

It is tempting to think that we know exactly what's right and what's wrong. To be sure, there is such a thing as right and wrong. Some things should not be permitted and we have a duty to speak out against them. To make ourselves the final authority on all such matters, however, is very dangerous. When we think that we know what's right and wrong and everyone else is just stupid, we need to do some self-reflection.

In our First Reading from *Genesis*, we heard about the first sin of humanity. As the account tells us, Adam and Eve were allowed to eat the fruit of all the trees in the garden, except one: the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The temptation from the serpent was, "God knows well that the moment you eat of [the fruit] your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods who know what is good and what is evil." Falling for the temptation, they thought they could be like God and know good and evil. As it turned out, it was a lie. Soon after, they realized that they were no longer so innocent.

You may recall that one of Jesus' teachings was against judging. This was not a way of denying judgment altogether, but as a reminder of the fact that only God can accurately and absolutely judge. Only God has access to the tree in the middle of the garden, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We are not to judge due to the fact that there is too much margin for error in human judgment. That much should be clear to us when we consider realities such as innocent people being sentenced to death in the court system, whole institutions thinking coverups of abuse were OK, and the promotion of long established laws which were (and are)

discriminatory in nature. Human judgment, even with the best of intentions, isn't objective.

Some people claim that reality is black and white, while others insistently reject that and mention that everything is gray. In a certain sense, both are legitimate. There is black and white, and there is gray. The key qualification for us is, 'but only God knows for sure the black and white part.' For the rest of us, relying on scripture, tradition, and experience, we strive to discern what is best, knowing that most of what we say and believe is an educated guess. We live in the gray area.

God is the one and only authority on right and wrong, good and evil.

Have I set myself up as the judge of right and wrong?

As we enter into this season of Lent, we turn to Jesus for the strength to resist temptation. We often think of temptations as those scandalous things which lead us into the sins of the flesh. But the temptation we are asked to resist today is one that doesn't seem so scandalous, yet, it is one of the worst. It was the first sin ever recorded: the one that says, 'I know what's right and what's wrong.'