

4th Sunday Lent (B)

- God loved the world so much that he gave his only son.... Think about it!
- As Christians in the world we cannot help but be influenced by the developments that happen around us.
- Indeed, we believe that many of these advances are gifts from God, given to us to enjoy, but not all developments in thinking and practices are for the better.
- One recent and alarming development is the false thinking that we cannot judge other people, or that we should not be judged.
- The wider community regularly maintains that no one is in a position to judge another's behaviour or statements.
- This approach holds that everyone's words and actions are of equal value.
- This position is many things, but it's certainly not Christian, but this hasn't stopped it from finding a home amongst us.
- We regularly hear statements from Christian men & women like, 'We're not in a position to judge' or 'You can't judge them' & 'If it's fine for them, then it's fine'.
- This thinking has a name. It's called moral relativism and it tries to claim that the morality of behaviour is only determined by the person who does the act, or the context within which the action is taken.
- Our Catholic tradition teaches us that a context is very important in trying to work out if someone is to blame for what they say and do, but that a person's particular circumstances never change the fact that the words or actions are in themselves wrong.
- We hold that while all human beings have equal value and dignity, we do not believe that everyone's opinion and actions are of equal worth.
- We believe that 'right judgment' is a gift of the Holy Spirit and that it's best exercised with humility and compassion.
- When I hear people say I should not judge others, I assume they are telling me that I should not condemn other people.
- There is a world of difference between judging and condemning.
- To judge is to make an assessment. To condemn is to damn.
- As Christians we judge because we have to keep discerning how the things of the world can be reconciled with the things we hold to be true.
- Condemnation is the prerogative of God alone, who sees all, knows all and loves all, but do we believe this?
- Today's readings portray the people of God as adolescents constantly testing out the limits of God's love.
- In a remarkable act, God's own Son is sent into the world to die as a sign of the lengths to which God will go to assure humanity of the love he has for us.

- But what image of God is portrayed in the world?
- Think for a moment of the last time you saw or heard a reference to God on a television program, in a song, or some other popular medium.
- Chances are, the reference was one of a judging, vengeful, punishing God.
- This sort of image plays particularly well with a modern audience.
- It's easier to dismiss God as irrelevant if we can paint God in that sort of image.
- TV sitcoms do it particularly well with thunderclaps, bolts of lightning and booming, disapproving voices from above; it's much harder to dismiss a God of love who will go to extremes to demonstrate that love.
- The gospel passage tells us that God's Son was not sent into the world to condemn it, but rather, 'so that through him the world might be saved'.
- It also tells us that whoever refuses to believe 'is already condemned'.
- God does not condemn the world, nor individuals within it.
- Indeed, God is absolutely determined to save the world.
- However, we do sometimes condemn ourselves.
- When we turn our back on love; when we hide from relationships; when we wallow in selfishness – we shut ourselves off from relationship with God and condemn ourselves.
- We only have to open our eyes to see the alternative!
- In today's Gospel, however, John tells us that even God has forfeited the right to condemn the world, but has sent Jesus to be the world's light, life, truth and saviour.
- The Gospel reminds us that if we feel condemned for what we have done and said, then it's because we have condemned ourselves, not because God condemns us.
- John tells us that even when we find ourselves lost in the darkness of our most destructive behaviour, the saving love of Christ is always available to us, inviting us to come out of the darkness into his light.
- What a great metaphor the light and dark is for making the best judgments in our own lives.
- Alarm bells should always ring when we find ourselves not wanting anyone else to know what we have said or done.
- Secrecy is often the ally of sin and the more open and transparent we are, the more confident we can be that we are walking as children of the light.
- May this Lenten Eucharist enable us to let go of the desire to condemn others and ourselves, and to receive again the compassionate, just and humble gift of right judgment that helps us to see the darkness for what it is, and keeps us walking in the light of Christ.