



THE PASTOR'S POST

COURT

Dear Parish Family:

Over the past few weeks, I have found myself in various court and legal situations. In light of some of the recent rhetoric and because of my concern for some of the people on my path, I have been asked to accompany others as they go before a judge for various issues -some related to their own mistakes, others related to the mistakes of others. It is not necessarily my favorite way to spend the day but I hope in some way it makes a difference.

Over these weeks, and in no way do I seek to minimize the importance of these proceedings for those involved, I found myself smiling a bit. The appearance of a priest on line waiting to get into court, or sitting in the waiting area for the next hearing, or sitting in the court itself draws an enormous amount of stares and even a few comments. I could overhear - yes I was eavesdropping - two people behind me with many theories about why I was there. (Not good ones, either!) Today, one person saw me, kept walking, turned around, and came back to look at me again. I could use that as a compliment for my good looks or my very fashionable black suit, but I don't think it was that. (This contrasts with an attorney who saw me in the hall and said, out loud, "Father John, what are **YOU** doing here?" I explained I was there to pray for his soul. We each had a good laugh.)

As we continue to read the Sermon on the Plain from the Gospel of Luke, I cannot help but be struck by the line, "Stop judging and you will not be judged. Stop condemning and you will not be condemned." It's obviously a verse I have heard before but could not help feel some of that judgment and condemnation as I took in some of the stares and double takes of these past few weeks.

As I write this, I think to myself, I'm not that much better.

We live in a time of great judgement, and often a rush to it. There is a great danger here. How

often are people jumping to conclusions when someone else makes a mistake? We think immediately there is more to this than a mistake or an error. Oftentimes, we are looking for the weak spot in the other - whoever that is - so we can pronounce judgment. Or are there times we see someone in a certain place or moment and have already formed our judgment about what **MUST** be happening? And, unfortunately, when we find out our initial judgement or opinion was incorrect, we just keep going! We certainly have this happening with many of our leaders and popular figures these days.

This is not to say we do not have an obligation to call out things that are wrong and work towards conversion and renewal. This is the work of the prophet, of the disciple. However, are there times we are much more concerned with judgment than mercy, condemnation than compassion? What if we treated our enemies in the way David did in the first reading today? He had Saul exactly where he wanted him...but did not take advantage of the moment.

I was thinking today of some advice from St. Ignatius of Loyola. He writes, *"... it should be presupposed that every good Christian ought to be more eager to put a good interpretation on a neighbor's statement than to condemn it. Further, if one cannot interpret it favorably, one should ask how the other means it. If the meaning is wrong, one should correct the person with love; if this is not enough, one should search out every appropriate means through which, by understanding the statement in a good way, it may be saved"* (Spiritual Exercises 22).

As we move closer to Lent, maybe judgment is an area for us to work on this Lent - less condemnation, more compassion, less judgement, more justice.

Please pray for me. I promise the same.

