



Center for Spiritual Development

# *Daily Reflections*

## JOURNEYING THROUGH LENT

Photo by Alan Carrillo from Unsplash

### TO ERR ON THE SIDE OF MERCY

By Sister Jane DeLisle, CSJ

*"Let the one among you who is without sin  
be the first to throw a stone at her."*

JOHN 8:7

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#### Reflection

As this is the fifth week of Lent, the stories of Jesus' encounters are attracting the threatening attention of the Pharisees, protectors of the law and tradition. The story of the woman caught in adultery is a poignant one that turns the tables on the accusers and roots one in mercy and forgiveness. I have often wondered about the man who was also "caught in the act."

In any case, the story and Jesus' reaction are a powerful witness to God's love, mercy, and forgiveness. God desires that we be whole and in right relationship and so forgives us when we turn to God and ask pardon for our sin.

This story reminds me to think again when I am being harsh, critical, or judgmental. Yes, there is sin, bad behavior not worthy of our God-given dignity. Sin—both serious and careless—can bring us to our knees. The temptation is great to focus on our goodness and avoid attending to our sin that easily blends into the status quo of our unreflective attitudes and behavior.

I may come up against another's sin that seems so egregious, and my heart turns to judgement, comparison, and condemnation. The truth is that I have no idea what is going on inside a person and the efforts they make to live in right relationship. I have no insight into another's inner struggles to just live in the day today.

The compassion of Jesus reminds me that I cannot judge the inner disposition of another person's soul. I may notice and wonder, but not judge, let alone condemn. I, too, am capable of sin, any sin. The adage, "There but for the grace of God go I" (John Bradford, 16<sup>th</sup> century) is one to bear in mind. I do not know another's back story or experience that brings them to this place of obvious weakness and vulnerability.

Jesus himself did not seem to judge or condemn. To disapprove of the sin and love the sinner seems to be the way of Jesus, God among us. To err on the side of mercy and compassion while praying for the other's good is the witness Jesus offers.

I believe that Jesus was dismayed at times at the hardness of heart demonstrated by so many people of God. He wept over Jerusalem for the people did not see or know the goodness and beauty to which they were invited. Love is the language of the Gospel. Love is the only force that can change hearts toward the good. Jesus loved us lavishly. He gave himself completely, suffering death and humiliation on a cross for us. Can we do anything less than err on the side of mercy and compassion?



## For Pondering

- What is my inner disposition, attitude, and behavior toward the perceived sin of another?
- What is my degree of self-righteousness or is there an invitation to humility?
- In what ways do I seek forgiveness for my own weakness, failure, and sin?
- For what grace do I pray so that I step away from judgment and condemnation of another?

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## Closing Prayer

*Gracious and loving God, help me find my home in you and in your ways of mercy. Help me seek first to understand, to be patient with another's weakness and sin. Keep me from self-righteous pride of place. Create in me a heart of compassion that I may be supportive of each person and avoid judgement of anyone. Forgive my own sinful ways. Please, be my saving help and teach me the way of humility. Amen*

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