

A few months ago, I was driving on Mercer Island. I know many of you don't know the island, but for those who do, I was going past the old City Hall heading to go up Gallegher Hill. At the foot of that steep incline there is an intersection and crosswalk with one of those flashing yellow light signals for people to push when they want to cross the street. As I approached, I saw a pedestrian closing in on the crosswalk. Could I beat him before he hit the yellow lights? Nope. So, I slow down, thinking I'll crawl slowly enough to let him get across without needing to stop. But he was really slow, and another person appeared – so I had to stop a short way in front of the cross to let him pass.

Just then I heard a loud voice, "Do not block an intersection!" What!? Then I noticed a police car stopped at the stop sign to my right at the intersection. The officer had used the exterior intercom, PA speaker. The police officer didn't do anything wrong. She just stated the facts. And I didn't do or say anything else either. There really wasn't

much to do. The people had crossed by then – and I sheepishly proceeded.

But here's why I remember this incident. Deep in my heart there was a flash of anger. It was partly due to hurt pride in being made to look a little silly in public (there were the other cars – the pedestrians turned and stared). But it wasn't only the public part. That police officer had implied I had done a wrong. How dare she reprimand me! My reaction wasn't rational, but it was real. Pride! I don't like being told I've done something wrong.

When I read these words of Jesus in the Gospel today, I tend to focus on the person trying to approach the sinner. Maybe that's because I do have to tell people of their sins sometimes (like that police officer) and it's never easy, so Jesus' words are a call to do the job and not be silent when I should speak.

But today I also want to think about the sinner who is told he's sinning. That can be really hard to hear. I don't even like to be told I

broke the traffic code. Think what I'm like when I've sinned and my conscience bothers me, and someone calls me on it. But Jesus is telling us we need to be able, not only to speak this truth with love to our brothers and sisters who are sinning – but also to be able to listen humbly when we ourselves are warned.

Notice what this passage tells us about Jesus' idea of the Church and the public nature of sin. Some people ask why we Catholics go to a priest for confession. Isn't my sin just between me and God? No, actually, it isn't. My sin hurts other people. Every person's sins hurt the whole Body of Christ. The priest listens and speaks, not only as Christ in the sacrament, but for that community.

This passage also shows that when we hear Jesus say, "Do not judge," He doesn't mean we shouldn't call out sin. Jesus Himself says, "If [your brother] refuses to listen even to the church, then treat him as you would a Gentile or tax collector." Why is Jesus so seemingly harsh towards people who sin? For the sake of their own souls, but also for

the unity of the People of God. Sin separates and divides us from one another.

But note: the discipline Jesus commands is only for those who refuse to acknowledge their sins and won't try to change. Jesus loves us and knows our weaknesses. The Good Shepherd will go anywhere to help us if we're trying to leave sin behind. But towards those who deny they are even doing anything wrong -- He is firm. For the sake of the unity and health of the community, sin must be called out and corrected, or the sin spreads and hurts more, and more, souls.

Let us examine ourselves. Is someone in our life today warning us that we are sinning – we're hurting ourselves and others? Maybe we should listen to them more closely, and do some deep praying about it, rather than take offense and assume we're in the right.

But that takes real virtue, humility, prayer. I want to end by offering you an aid in that spiritual growth. The parish has recently registered with the "Hallow" app. This means you now have some free

resources available. First, there is our own parish page where you can join in periodic prayer challenges. There are other prayer tools – guided meditations for the rosary, reflections on the day’s readings, podcasts, Catholic media speakers, audio books, music – chant as well as praise and worship music, etc.

There will be a Hallow parish family kickoff event on Tuesday, September 15 from 6:30 – 8:00. This will consist of fellowship, prayer and a talk from someone from Hallow explaining how it could help you. There is a banner in the narthex with a Hallow QR code that takes you to our parish page. I have heard many good things about Hallow and ask you please check it out.

Holiness is possible for all of us. Jesus calls all of us “Brothers” in His teaching. “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault . . . If he listens you have won over your brother.” It’s not easy to hear that, whether from a police officer, a priest – or our family and friends. But we’re to challenge and hear one another from a place of love – not

anger, pride, or a sense of moral superiority. Let our calling one another to live out the gospel always be done humbly and be directed towards our living in better unity with Christ, which is their happiness and ours.