

We just heard a rather dramatic gospel in which Jesus' words and actions taught us about judgement, condemnation, and forgiveness. Pay special attention to his last words. "Has no one condemned you? Neither do I condemn you." That part is easy and I am sure we all pay attention to that. Don't forget the very last thing he said: "Go, and **from now on do not sin any more.**" He forgave the woman her sins...but his final instructions were for her to amend her life and sin no more. When we go to Confession and make the act of contrition, we make promises to amend our lives and to avoid the near occasion of sin. Do we keep those promises?

That's probably plenty for you to think about, but I'm going to give you some more. The reading we heard from Paul's letter to the Phillippians is also pretty dramatic if we understand the context and apply it to our lives. Paul wrote that he considered everything to be a loss, to be so much rubbish. What things? We didn't hear it in the reading but he just gave the Phillippians his credentials: "If anyone else thinks he can be confident in flesh, all the more can I. Circumcised on the eighth day, of the race of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrew parentage, in observance of the law a Pharisee, in zeal I persecuted the church, in righteousness based on the law I was blameless." He was proud of his Jewish heritage. He had worked hard in his study of the scriptures and religious practices. Although the word Pharisee sounds bad to us because of what happened between some of them and Jesus, many Pharisees were authentic in their search for God and in their desire to help their brothers and sisters. He persecuted the followers of Jesus because his entire life experience taught him that was what he was supposed to do. But then he had an encounter with the risen Lord on the road to Damascus and everything changed. "Whatever gains I had, these I have come to consider a loss because of Christ." As important as all that stuff was before, after his encounter with Jesus, none of it mattered anymore. Jesus and his gospel became Paul's top priority.

Many of us are here because we have had an encounter with Jesus—probably not as dramatic as Paul's but it was significant enough to bring us here every Sunday. Others are here hoping to have such an encounter. A word of warning for all of us: Paul was knocked to the ground and blinded by his encounter with Jesus. A true encounter with Jesus will probably do the same for us because such an encounter requires us to realize where our pride gets in the way; we need to learn humility. Growing in humility requires of us an honest assessment of where we are at in our relationship with Jesus. Right now is the perfect time to reflect on this. The crosses and statues are covered; we have

entered the season of Passiontide which is an intensification of Lent and a time for us to really get serious about our final preparations for Easter. Which is why, now, I am going to talk about baseball.

Trevor Williams is currently a pitcher for the Washington Nationals. He loves baseball. Trevor is also a Catholic who loves Jesus. A few years ago he recorded some reflections for the Hallow app in which he challenged himself and us to see who and what we love the most. He said that everyday he encounters fans in the ballpark. They dress up in their favorite team's or player's jersey. They bring friends to the game. They show up early to get ready for the game and seek out their favorite players. He said it amazes him to see that...but as a Catholic, he knows that baseball is only a game. While sports do so many great things for our lives, there are things that are so much more important, including our faith. This can be said about many of the good things in our lives. But what takes top priority? What are we most passionate about?

After observing the wonderful fans in the ballpark, Trevor asked himself the following questions and they are good for us to reflect on too, according to our own interests, hobbies, and different aspects of our lives. Do we dress up to honor our Lord? God just wants us here; objectively, how we dress is less important than our presence here. But...if we can put in the effort to wear our team colors or dress up nicely for work or a dinner date, can we not take the time and effort to dress more appropriately when coming into the presence of God? Do we show up early to Mass to seek out God and to speak with him? If we can get to the game early, or get to the movie theater early, or to our dinner reservation early, or to work on time, can we not do the same for God? Do we share our faith with others or invite them to Mass with us? Am I engaged at Church and ready to encounter Jesus? This last one doesn't apply just to attending Mass. It also applies to our involvement in our parish community. If you want a healthy and thriving parish community, you have to get involved. Priests come and go. Since the Dominicans left this parish, the average length of time that priests have been assigned here is four and half years. Priests come and go, but the community remains. A healthy, thriving parish depends on your involvement. Next time you see an opportunity to get involved, take it. We can no longer have people content to sit on the sideline. Get involved in your parish!

Right now, during this time of final preparation for Easter, is the time to think about where our priorities lie. We still have time to ask God to help us put them back into order. Jesus will not condemn us if we are truly sorry. Jesus wants to forgive us, but he will also tell us to change our ways and sin no more.