

I am a defender of the pharisees. First of all, because their teachings are very similar to those of Jesus. Of all the religious groups at the time of Jesus, the pharisees were the closest to Jesus.

Secondly, the conflict depicted in Matthew and Luke between Jesus and the pharisees is not in Mark or John nor in any of the four accounts of passion where the pharisees do not appear at all. In fact, the pharisees have nothing at all to do with the death of Jesus. The conflict in Matthew and Luke reflects the conflict at the time the gospel was written between pharisaic Judaism and the early Christian community. Not knowing this can lead to antisemitism today, e.g., our use of the word pharisaic.

Thirdly, the pharisees saved Judaism. If there are Jews today it is because of the pharisees. In 70 A.D. the Jerusalem temple was destroyed. Sacrifices could no longer be offered and consequently there was no need for a priesthood. It was the pharisees who restructures Judaism into the form that it exists today.

Finally, the pharisee in today's gospel is basically a good person. And, he acknowledges that the good qualities that he has come from God:

"O God, I thank you that I am not greedy, dishonest adulterous. I fast twice a week, and I pay tithes on my whole income."

His problem is not that he is a bad person, but that he is self-righteous and judgmental:

"I am not like the rest of humanity -- or even like this tax collector."

It is very easy to be judgmental; it is natural and at times necessary. We need to judge situations in order to make good decisions. We need to look at the facts, judge them and decide. The problem is that this pharisee, without knowing the facts, is judging a person, the tax collector, the publican. How does he know this publican, is greedy, dishonest, adulterous, never fasts and avoids paying tithes? This was the reputation of publicans, the assumption. The publicans were the toll (tax) collectors for the Romans. It was assumed they were greedy and dishonest and charged more than what they were supposed to charge and then pocketed that money. Some undoubtedly were, but not all were that way. And, certainly this one, from his prayer, appears in particular not to be.

Today many people are being self-righteous and judgmental, like the pharisee in the parable, judging people, rather than situations, and without knowing all the facts. This is causing division in our country and also, unfortunately, in the church. Here, in California, one of the issues causing this division is Proposition 1, as people on both sides of the issue are judging those who hold opposite views.

We are called to judge situations not persons. We are to make the judgment about how we will vote but not to judge those who vote differently. And, as Christians, we are called to respect all people, regardless of their views. This is part of what being pro-life means. To protect life means to respect all life, the lives of those with whom we disagree. (And today: all life, including all sentient creatures as we pollute and endanger all life.)

We are also called to respect and protect all of human life, the whole of human life. It's what the late Cardinal Joseph Bernardine of Chicago called the seamless garment. All of life is one seamless garment from conception to its natural end. Cardinal Bernardine said this included not only abortion, but also meant opposing the death penalty and euthanasia. It means protecting the lives of mothers after birth of their child. To be pro-life cannot mean being only pro-birth, it needs to include care for mother during pregnancy and after the birth of the child. This means advocating for paid maternity leave, free health insurance, childcare, the WIC and Headstart programs.

As Catholics, you need to know that Bishop Cantu and the bishops of California are urging a No vote on proposition one and you need to take that into account as you decide, as you judge, how you will vote. My concern is what happens after birth.

The abolition of slavery is an example of how good things can go awry. When slavery was abolished in this country nothing was done for the freed slaves. The result was one hundred and fifty years of prejudice, discrimination, poverty, unemployment, inequality and injustice which continues to this day. Witness George Floyd and Black Lives Matter. It will be the same with abortion, regardless of how you vote, if it is forbidden but nothing is done for the mothers and their children.

In 2008, the abortion rate for White women was 12 abortions per 1000 women of childbearing age, for Hispanic women it was 29 per 1000, and for Black women 40 per 1000. Disparities in abortion rates also exist by socioeconomic status (SES), as measured by the federal poverty level (FPL). The federal poverty level is measured by the number of people in a family. For an individual, it is earning less than \$13,000 per year. For a family of two, say a single mother with one child, it is \$18,000. For a three-person family it is \$24,000. Women with incomes below the federal poverty level (FPL), the majority of whom are women of color, have an abortion rate of 52 abortions per 1000 women of childbearing age,

compared with a rate of 9 per 1000 among women with incomes greater than 200% FPL.

This hits close to home. Fr. John Coleman has told me that the city in San Mateo County with the highest number of abortions is East Palo Alto. These are not evil women killing children who deserve to be jailed. They are desperate woman caught in a cycle of poverty who see no way out of it. We can help provide a way out for them. That is why, however you vote, there needs to be a commitment to advocate for legislation—not charity provided by volunteer organizations—that will assure paid maternity leave for pregnant women, free health care and child care, and WIC and Headstart programs.

All of you know Fr. Jon Pedigo. He writes a weekly reflection of the Sunday readings. This week he wrote: “Self-righteousness is not a single act, but rather a system of thinking that leads to separation from others. Self-righteousness not only sets one apart from others, it sets one above others. Self-righteousness can absolve bad behavior in the name of God. It can incite hatred of those who think differently and simultaneously absolve its own members of violence that was done “in the name” of God. The truth is that we are both the arrogant pious person that sets our self above others and we are the humble and contrite person. Let us pray for greater humility and self-restraint in how we look at others and greater compassion for ourselves when we recognize that we have missed the mark.”

He is right. We are all pharisee and publican, sometimes self-righteous and judgmental, sometimes humble and repentant. We are broken people, so we come here to this table, broken people to share bread that is broken that will make us whole.

