

March 26, 2017 Lady Justice Homily: Brothers and sisters, in his confirmations hearings before the Senate Judiciary Committee, the nominee, Judge Neil Gorsuch, made a brief but telling reference to "Lady Justice", an iconic symbol of Judicial integrity.

The image of Lady Justice can sometimes be seen on display in front of some of the world's most renowned courthouses. She is depicted as dressed in a long, flowing robe and wearing a blindfold, representing impartiality and fairness. Justice must be served without the judge taking into consideration the defendant's wealth, power or influence. The evidence must be weighed carefully and the decision must be based on the facts ascertained in the proceedings. A so-called kangaroo court is a gross violation of justice and legal ethics. It brings disgrace upon the judge and the rule of law. Sadly, tragedy is very often the outcome of a biased and flawed decision.

The ninth chapter of John's gospel offers the reader an account of Our Lord's healing of the man born blind. Biblical scholars liken the episode to a judicial trial. Typically in John's gospel, Jesus remains the central figure of the compelling story. The team of prosecutors are members of the religious establishment, which include the long time adversaries of our Lord, the Pharisees. Clearly, they have formed a negative judgment of Jesus whom they have determined cannot come from God. As a group, they lack impartiality. In one sense, they have removed their blindfolds. They have already made up their minds that Jesus is an imposter, a phony, an enemy to be defeated. The man born blind who had his sight restored is the only one in this "one act play" (as one scholar describes it) who testifies boldly in Jesus' defense. In the face of fierce opposition and hostile questioning, he resolutely defends the one who healed him. Even his credibility is challenged. One member of the prosecution protests, "We know this man is a sinner". (Jn.9:24) Ironically, though he was physically blind, he was graced with a vision of Jesus not shared by most of the religious leaders of his day. He "sees" Jesus; the Pharisees do not. His badly frightened parents are uncooperative and therefore unhelpful. They feared expulsion from the synagogue and the worshipping community. They chose to remain on the sidelines! Jesus reveals to the blind man whom he had healed that he had come into the world for judgment, to separate the blind that can be healed from those who do not allow themselves to be healed, because they consider themselves healthy. As the chapter draws to a dramatic close, it is the religious establishment that is on trial. The lesson is obvious: there is no one more blind than the person who refuses to see nor more deaf than the one who refuses to hear. "Then Jesus said, 'I came into the world for judgment, so that those who do not see might see, and those who do see may become blind'". (Jn.9:39)

In their meditation on the biblical stories, the founder of the Society of Jesus, St. Ignatius of Loyola, counseled his disciples to place themselves in the biblical scene, in this instance, the healing of the man born blind. The question arises: Would we be on the side of the prosecutors of Jesus or would we come to his defense? Or, even worse, would we avoid making any noise and deflect attention away from ourselves and onto others? Do we really want to get involved at all?

Amen!