

April 3, 2017

Daniel 13:1-9, 15-17, 19-30, 33-62

During Lent, we focus on sin and God's salvific work in our lives. Our first reading from the Book of Daniel can extend our reflection in an important way. In this powerful story, two elders lust after the "very beautiful and God-fearing" Susanna. When their attempts to compromise her fail, the elders accuse her of adultery with a young man, and so seek her execution.

The story makes clear that the elders both testified against her. This is important because of a provision in the law documented in the Book of Deuteronomy: "One witness alone shall not take the stand against a man in regard to any crime or any offense of which he may be guilty; a judicial fact shall be established on the testimony of two or three witnesses."

By virtue of their status as elders and by virtue of their joint testimony, the two men who conspired against Joanna represented the community. Yes, they sinned as individuals and eventually paid the price for their sin. In essence, however, the community had sinned as well.

Sin can manifest itself in so many different ways in our individual lives, in our families, and in our communities. Attending to social justice concerns – concerns about the ways in which sin manifests itself in our culture – can and should be included into our Lenten reflections. Sexism, racism, ageism, and endemic poverty are sinful at the level of the individual and at the social level as well.

As the Book of Daniel relates, the young boy Daniel didn't just stand by as Joanna was being carried off to be killed. At great risk to himself, he intervened. "Stirred up by the Holy Spirit," he confronted the community. This is our duty as well.

**Reflection questions:**

Do I benefit willingly or unwillingly from any kind of social sin (e.g., racism, sexism, ageism, the unequal distribution of God's gifts and life's benefits and burdens, etc.)?

Through the way I live my life, do I stand in solidarity with those who are less fortunate than I am?

*Reflection by Deacon Daniel Lowery, St. Mary in Crown Point.*