**Story of Susanna and types of persons: WHO ARE YOU???**

By Very Rev. Fr. Dr. Michael Nsikak Umoh
First reading: Daniel 13:1-9,15-17,19-30,33-62

Susanna and the Elders

1. WHO ARE YOU???? Towards the end of our reflection, we shall come back to this question. WHO ARE YOU???
2. Yesterday Gospel reading on the woman caught in adultery. Today, on a woman falsely accused of adultery. In both cases, the accusers are men, and the men accomplices are not in the scene.
3. This is not a gender war, but it’s instructive to note that reality.
4. But it shows how our world frames narratives, and we all seem comfortable with it; STEREOTYPES. They just seem normal. When evil thrives for too long, they seem normal and acceptable.
5. MANY CHARACTERS IN THIS STORY ….. DEFINE OUR PERSON. WHO ARE YOU? WE CAN SEE OURSELVES STRONGLY REPRESENTED IN ONE OF THESE CHARACTERS … DOMINANT SPIRIT OPERATING IN US.
6. Our first reading today vividly tells the story of Susanna from Daniel 13, wherein she decides to bath alone in her husband’s garden; unknown to her, there were two CREEPY elders peeping at her. These men were also JUDGES.
7. Msgr. Pedro Martins, one of our foremost priests in Lagos who died at the age of 103: One of the PREROGATIVES OF ELDERS ….. say anything without being questioned, say anything and be believed to be true. Elders are custodians of truth. WHAT DOES POWER MEAN TO YOU?
8. One thing seriously lacking in our political sphere. RULED PRIMARILY BY LIES AND DECEPTION..all in the name of politics or diplomacy. RUB BADLY ON SOCIETY AS A WHOLE, UNFORTUNATELY EVEN THE CHURCH TO SOME EXTENT.
9. TYRANNY AND OPPRESSION IN SOME OF OUR SOCIETIES!!!
10. TIME FOR ELECTION, YOU SEE THE ANIMAL IN US REAR ITS UGLY FACE.
11. These 2 elders decided to make advances on Susannah. Taking ADVANTAGE OF THEIR POSITION OF TRUST! They threaten to publicly accuse her of adultery if she does not comply; an accusation that would end in her execution.
12. MANY MORE PEOPLE TODAY, in our country where the law is weak and often skewed in favour of the mighty, TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THEIR POSITION TO ABUSE, MOLEST, SUPPRESS OTHERS. MANY suffering SUSANNAs IN OUR SOCIETY TODAY. We find them in OUR Secondary and particularly TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS, OFFICES, COMMUNITIES, VILLAGES, FAMILIES… in many WIDOWS. In the name of customs and traditions, many Susannic elders have rendered widows homeless. Unfortunately, some of them are Catholics, occupying high positions. We really need to be converted.
13. Read how the two elders are described after “they began to lust for her” (Dn 13:8).
**“They perverted their thinking; they would not allow their eyes to look to heaven and did not keep in mind just judgments” (Dn 13:9).**
14. The story helps us understand how sin enters into our lives to corrupt our thoughts, our actions. We are shown that sin progresses in a subtle manner, from seemingly harmless level when we are careless about the things we allow and tolerate around us. From what we feed our hearts with. What we listen to, watch and engage in.
15. **There are people, places and things that are occasions of sin for us. We need to identify them and do something about them.**
16. **Age long proverb: What you will not eat, do not smell!**
17. [**Proverbs 4:23**](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov%204.23)**(King James): Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it *spring* the issues of life.**[**Good News Translation**](https://biblehub.com/gnt/proverbs/4.htm): Be careful how you think; your life is shaped by your thoughts.
18. My son, be attentive to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. 21Let them not escape from your sight; keep them within your heart. 22For they are life to those who find them, and healing to all their flesh. 23Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.
19. HOW TO KEEP OUR HEARTS WITH ALL DELIGENCE
20. In [Proverbs 4:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov%204.24) we are warned about guarding out **speech**. In [Proverbs 4:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov%204.25) we are warned to guard our **eyes**. In [Proverbs 4:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov%204.26) we are warned to use our **minds** wisely. And in [Proverbs 4:27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov%204.27) we are told to guard the **course of our lives by staying away from evil**. All of these warnings come after [Proverbs 4:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov%204.23) where we are told to guard our hearts.
21. So in [Proverbs 4:20-22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov%204.20-22) we are told to take God’s truth into our hearts. We are then told to guard our hearts which hold that truth which brings life in [Proverbs 4:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov%204.23). And finally we are told to then pay attention to the way we are living our lives in [Proverbs 4:24-27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov%204.24-27). This is the natural flow all Christians must follow if they want to live for Christ.
22. Remember, it is not that which goes into a person that defiles, but rather that which comes out. So, if that which first goes into the heart is monitored and managed (the heart is the seat of all motives of life) the heart is being kept. A heart full of sin and foolishness does not have life flowing from it.
23. HOW ARE OUR HEARTS AFFECTED TODAY?
24. **PHONES, IPOD, BLOCKING OF EARS, ADDICTION TO SOCIAL MEDIA, ALLIENATION CAUSED BY THE MEDIA …… DO WE HAVE MEDIA DIET?**
25. **STORY OF DEVILS CONFERENCE…. Wise demon…go to church, but hold your phone!!!**
26. We have a generation of children and youth whose ears are blocked with earphones, so they are not able to listen to elders. A generation that does not have opportunity to hear from the elders spell a disaster.
27. To guard your heart means you fill it with truth and then you make sure you guard that truth so you do not forget it or ignore it.**To “Guard your heart” means you will be nourishing the new nature and starving the old nature, so your behavior will be righteous.**
28. **HOW MANY CHRSITIAN BOOKS AND CDS DO WE HAVE IN THE HOUSE? What type of images adorn the walls of or home? CARTOONS FOR CHILDREN? MUSIC? WHAT MEANS OF ENTERTAINMENT?**
29. **The elders did not commit a sin because they had sexual desires. TEMPTATION IS NOT SIN, BUT sin begins with temptation. Temptation is opportunity of grace or disgrace. Grace when we choose God, disgrace when we fall short by disobeying him.**
30. One of the scandals of our faith is that IN JESUS, EVEN GOD WAS TEMPTED: remember, even sinless Jesus faced temptation. As long as we are in human form, temptation is inevitable. There is a difference between being tempted and committing immoral acts.
31. This line from Daniel shows us what has to happen within us before the temptation can become actual sin.
32. For an act to be considered a sin ….. KNOWLEDGE, FREEDOM, MENTALLY STABLE, INTENTIONAL, WILLFUL. Therefore, we can commit sin by act or by thought.
33. From the abundance of the heart, comes forth our actions … you already commit adultery in the heart.
34. **Perhaps Jesus had this story in mind when he said, “Everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell” (Matthew 5:28-29, NRSV).**
35. The elders perverted their thinking. Note: this is not something that passively happened — they intentionally twisted their own thoughts, in order to convince themselves that what they knew to be wrong was in fact right. How did they do this? By not allowing their eyes to look to heaven.
36. **This is the most critical line of the passage. By not looking to heaven, they avoid the light of goodness and truth.**
37. **At times people intentionally refuse to LISTEN TO GOD in order to remain in sin.**
38. Had they looked to heaven, the darkness of their evil desires would have been revealed. Their guilt would have been undeniable.
39. **There are two ways to end the pain of a guilty conscience: turn away from sin or turn away from the light. The creepy elders turned away from the light.**
40. By perverting their minds in order to justify their sin, they rendered themselves unable to fulfill their vocation.
41. **By contrast we have Susanna, who never took her gaze off of God. She understands the dire nature of her situation. Either she commits adultery with these men and escape earthly punishment; or refuse, and be punished for the very crime she refused to commit. Looked at from a purely worldly perspective, it would seem better for Susanna to commit the sinful act and save her own life than to be killed for not doing it.**
42. But Susanna does not have a worldly perspective. Her perspective is that of heaven.
“If I yield, it will be my death; if I refuse, I cannot escape your power. Yet it is better for me not to do it and to fall into your power than to sin before the Lord” (Dn. 13:23).
43. There is no fate worse in Susanna’s mind than to sin against God. Such an act would be a betrayal of His love.
44. The elders follow through on their threat and at her trial, humiliate her. “As she wept she looked up to heaven, for she trusted in the Lord wholeheartedly” (Dn 13:35).
45. Through all of her trials, Susanna never took her eyes off of God.
46. **We can spend years studying the moral teachings of the Church. We can memorize the Catechism backwards and forwards. But we will still be tempted. And when faced with temptation, all the knowledge in the world won’t help us if we remove our eyes from heaven.**
47. We can have every intention to do good and still find ourselves faced with seemingly impossible situations, where every power in the world seems bent upon forcing us to do the wrong thing. It is so easy for us to fall, especially when our lives or our livelihood are in peril — though most of us yield at the smallest threat to our comfort or reputation. **The courage to resist worldly influences can only come from keeping our eyes on heaven and trusting in the Lord, as did Susanna.**
48. When they confront one another, they both confess:  **WHO DO YOU TURN TO WHEN IN NEED OF COUNSELLING??? BEER PARLOUR? JOINTS? HAIR SALON? OR YOUR SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR…SOMEONE WHO WILL TELL YOU THE TRUTH AND GUIDE YOU TO THE RIGHT PATH?**
49. **This should have been the moment that they talked each other out of acting on their impure impulses. Instead, they decide to collude with one another, believing that their advances will have a greater chance of succeeding if they approach her together.**
50. **1 Corinthians 15:33 “Bad company corrupts good character”.**
51. **Susanna has no control over what the men will say, but she does have control over what she will do next. She screams.**
52. **In attempting to cover up their own sin, these two men have ruined the reputation of a righteous woman and called into question the reputation of her faithful attendants. This is the case with many women who find themselves sexually assaulted by men in positions of authority above them.)**
53. **Then the two elders stood up before the people and laid their hands on her head.**
54. Her only appeal now is to God. And Susanna does what her two accusers stopped doing when they started down this path: **she looks up to Heaven.**
55. **Because they were elders of the people and judges, the assembly believed them and condemned her to death.**
56. **No one questions why the men were in the garden in the first place. No one asks them to describe the young man. They don’t ask Susanna to tell her side of the story. And they don’t question the integrity of the judges. Without asking a single question, they find Susanna guilty as charged.**
57. **We Are told that fake news are 6x likely to be believed that news that are true. Fake news sells. Scandalous news thrives. MAJOR DANGER OF OUR AGE AND TIME.**
58. Though she was innocent, **the court of public opinion had already reached a verdict** (probably before she even entered the room).
59. ONE LONELY VOICE WAS ABLE TO SPEAK UP FOR TRUTH. **God stirred up the holy spirit of a young lad named Daniel, 46 and he shouted with a loud voice, “I want no part in shedding this woman’s blood!”**
60. Though her plea falls on deaf ears among the people in the crowd, God hears her cry. **As God often does, the Almighty does not intervene directly, but instead prompts a young man in the crowd named Daniel to speak on God’s behalf.** **The lone voice of descent gets the crowd’s immediate attention. “What did you say?” One voice of reason speaking up against “mob mentality” is enough to give everyone pause.**
61. **Daniel employs a tactic that is a staple of good detective work—separate the witnesses and see if their story aligns.**
62. **The God of justice prevails.** Yet the text does not say that the people repented for their rush to judgment. The two men show no remorse for their actions. They were fully prepared to let an innocent woman be executed to cover their own sin. And this is all too often the case.
63. **Happy ending, right? Unfortunately the “happy ending” of the Susanna story is not the norm.**

**WHO ARE YOU: MAN THE BEAST? MAN THE HUMAN? MAN THE REDEEEMED?**