

5th Sunday of Lent "C" 2010

I. "Then Jesus standing up, said 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' 'No one, sir'. 'Then neither do I condemn you. Go and do not sin anymore'" (Jn.8:10-11). One of the characters in Ursula Hegi's novel about Nazi Germany, called "Stone from the River" is Ilse Abramovitz. Ilse is a Jewish woman whose husband, Michael, has been arrested and humiliated by a group of young Nazis. They come to her house, vandalized it, humiliated her and her husband and taken him away. One of the young men is Helmut Eberhardt who Ilse knows is to be married the next day. She pities the bride of this young so called Aryan superman. But Ilse would rather be the one persecuted than the one who does the persecution; she'd rather endure humiliation than grow numb to what it is to be human.

II. Better to be persecuted than numb to what's human. But powerlessness can corrupt too. Some of the worst terrorists today have numbed themselves to what it means to be human and they got that way not because of the experience of power, but by its opposite-humiliation. Martin Luther King use to use the rather strong example of a young boy abused and humiliated by a gang of older youths whose soul at that moment is up for grabs. He can either taste humiliation that leads to permanent bitterness or he can taste the blood of the Crucified Christ. Such an experience leaves prone to violence or feeling that privileged powerlessness that Jesus calls 'Blessed'.

III. Is it better to be rich than poor. If you're gifted, respected, able to achieve your dreams shouldn't that naturally lead to gratitude? Sometimes it does and you can see it in people of noble soul, but more commonly it

doesn't. It leads to an attitude of entitlement, or resentment that some have more than we do-to what Ursula Hegi called "a moral numbing-down". It's a slippery slope that can numb us to what's best inside-our innate natural compassion, our deepest desire for what's best. And that forces us to live a lie-and that's where violence begins. There's a risk in powerlessness and humiliation like the woman in the gospel experienced, but there an even greater risk in the opposite. Ilse Abramovitz chose the better part: Better to be persecuted than to be numb to what's human.