

Pray that our schoolchildren feel the Lord's gaze on them

When asked in an interview, "Who is Jorge Mario Bergoglio?" Pope Francis (Bergoglio himself) humbly replied, "I am a sinner. This the most accurate definition. It is not a figure of speech, a literary genre. I am a sinner."

We all know the Gospel account of the woman caught in the act of adultery. In it, we are told the scribes and Pharisees "led a woman forward" and "made her stand in front of everyone." I wonder how she felt at that moment. I imagine she felt humiliated, scared and full of shame. Just as our Holy Father is acutely aware of his own sinful nature, I suspect the woman was also aware of hers. In 1 Timothy 1:15, Paul says "The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the foremost." St. Gemma Galgani once said, "Think of all the sins the greatest sinners have committed, I have committed as many."

Whether we are talking about Paul, Augustine, Mother Teresa or Pope Francis, the great Saints of our world seem to share the ability to be aware of their sins and their need for God's mercy. As Paul writes in Romans 5:20, "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more." God seems to take great sinners who are aware of their sins and their need for God's mercy and flood them with his grace.

I suppose the message is that we are all sinners and it is important for us to be aware of our sinful ways. But God does not want us to live in that place of guilt and shame. We can see this in the example given to us by Pope Francis who uses the painting "The Calling of St. Matthew" by Caravaggio. The painting depicts the momentous encounter when Jesus called the sinful tax collector to follow him. Pope Francis reflects, "That's me. I feel like him... Here, this is me, a sinner on whom the Lord has turned his gaze." This same message can be true for you and me. In the Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas, we strive to work with parents in teaching the children about right and wrong. We teach them about the redemptive grace of Jesus. We teach them that our Lord has turned his gaze upon each one of us. Please join me in praying this Lent for our students, and for ourselves, for the grace of wisdom to be aware of our sins and for our need of God's mercy. Let us pray for the Lord to turn his gaze onto us.