

My Brothers and Sisters,

I think we would all agree that actions speak louder than words. In the parable of the prodigal son or prodigal father from last Sunday's Gospel, Jesus talked about God's mercy and forgiveness. In the story of the woman caught in adultery in today's Gospel, Jesus shared God's merciful, forgiving, reconciling love with the woman.

In today's Gospel, the scribes and the Pharisees challenged Jesus: "*Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?*" Since she had been caught in the act, he could not argue that maybe she was not guilty. If he told them to let her go, they could say that since he did not observe the law of Moses, he could not be from God. On the other hand, if he said she should be stoned, all his talk about forgiveness and mercy would be shown to be just empty words.

After initially ignoring them, Jesus responded, "*Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.*" *And in response, they went away one by one, beginning with the elders.*" Jesus reminded them that they needed God's mercy and forgiveness as much as the woman did. They may not have committed adultery, but they had all sinned.

This story has two practical applications for us. First, it reminds us that all of us also need God's mercy and forgiveness. We are united with one another not only as sons and daughters of God but also are united in needing God's mercy and forgiveness. The corollary of this is that none of us is ever in a position to judge anyone else.

At the end of the story, Jesus asked her if anyone had condemned her. When she said no, he replied, "*Neither do I condemn you. Go, (and) from now on do not sin any more.*" Jesus was not simply telling her not to sin any more. Rather, he was empowering her not to sin again. As Catholics, we believe that the Sacrament of Reconciliation not only forgives our sins in the sense of wiping the slate clean but also empowers us to live better, more Christian lives. Love calls forth the best in us.

This is consistent with the first two readings. In the reading from Isaiah, God said, "*Remember not the events of the past, the things of long ago consider not; See, I am doing something new!*" The same is true of the second reading. Paul wrote, "*Forgetting what lies behind but straining forward to what lies ahead, I continue my pursuit toward the goal, the prize of God's upward calling, in Christ Jesus.*" God does not want us to focus on the sins of our past. He wants us to focus on the present and the future. Forgiveness and reconciliation are as much or more about the future as they are about the past.

Second, in referring to righteousness, Paul wrote, "*It is not that I have already taken hold of it or have already attained perfect maturity, but I continue my pursuit in hope that I may possess it.*" Although God empowers us to live better, more Christian lives, none of us will ever attain perfect maturity or perfection. Since sin will always be part of our lives, ongoing conversion also needs to always be part of our lives. What is important is that we keep striving and keep growing into the likeness of Christ.

My brothers and sisters, during Lent, we enter into the mystery of Jesus' dying and rising so that we may die to sin and then rise to new life with him. Easter, then, will not only be the celebration of Jesus' resurrection to new life but also the celebration of our own resurrection to new life with him.