

5th Sunday of Lent - C
Isaiah 43:16-21;
Philippians 3:8-14;
John 8:1-11
Little Flower - 4/3/22

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today's Gospel tells the story of the woman caught in adultery. In last Sunday's Gospel, Jesus told the Parable of the Prodigal Son or, better, the Prodigal Father. In today's Gospel, Jesus demonstrated the meaning of forgiveness.

Imagine yourselves listening to Jesus teaching early one morning when all of a sudden the scribes and Pharisees, religious leaders, bring a woman whom they caught committing adultery and make her stand right in front of everyone. They said to 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?*" As we witness this, if we are perceptive, we realize that the scribes and the Pharisees really could not have cared less about the woman and her act of adultery. They were using her to trap Jesus.

They thought they had him. He could not ask them to excuse her because she might not be guilty. She was caught in bed with another man. They thought they had him on the horns of a dilemma. If he said, "Stone her," they could say to the people that all his talk about love and forgiveness was just empty talk. On the other hand, if he told them to let her go, they could say that he did not follow the Law of Moses and, therefore, could not be from God.

However, instead of answering, Jesus ignored them and started writing on the ground. Older commentators suggested that Jesus was writing their sins on the ground. More recent commentators would argue that nothing in the passage suggests this. By ignoring them, Jesus was detensifying the situation. When they persisted in asking him, he straightened up and said, "*Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.*" He then went back to writing. We are then told that they went away one by one, beginning with the elders.

Jesus' challenge to them suggests an important theological truth. In his challenge to them, Jesus was reminding them that they (and by extension we) were one with her in needing God's mercy and forgiveness. Jesus certainly was not suggesting that they had all committed adultery. He was suggesting that since they had all sinned, they were in no position to judge or condemn her. In other words, the entire People of God are always united in needing God's mercy and forgiveness. When we are thinking of judging or condemning someone for what they did, we need to remember that although we may not have committed that specific sin, we are guilty of our own sins. It is interesting that the elders left first, a reminder that the older we are the more most of us have sinned. Although we tend to be most critical of young people for their choices, they are still young and have limited life experience. We might better ask what our excuse is.

Finally, when Jesus was alone with the woman, he again straightened up and asked her whether anyone had condemned her. She said, "*No one, sir.*" He then said, "*Neither do I condemn you. Go, (and) from now on do not sin any more.*" Jesus' words contain the second theological truth of this passage. Usually when we think of forgiveness, we think of wiping the slate clean, wiping away the past. Some Scripture scholars, however, argue that Jesus was not so much ordering her not to sin as empowering her not to sin. In other words, Jesus' forgiveness is not so much about the past but about the future. It is not so much wiping the slate clean as empowering us to change. When we are forgiven by God or others, we are empowered to become better. When we forgive others, we empower them to become better.

My brothers and sisters, this week please re-read this passage in light of my reflection and then allow God to speak to you, the person you are today, with your thoughts and feelings, with everything going on in your life, as a starting point for your prayer.