

April 3, 2022
5th Sunday of Lent
John 8:1-11

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. But early in the morning he arrived again in the temple area, and all the people started coming to him, and he sat down and taught them. Then the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery and made her stand in the middle. They said to him, "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?" They said this to test him, so that they could have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and began to write on the ground with his finger. But when they continued asking him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." Again he bent down and wrote on the ground. And in response, they went away one by one, beginning with the elders. So he was left alone with the woman before him. Then Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She replied, "No one, sir." Then Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin anymore."

Background:

While this text is taken from John's gospel, it reflects a common theme of Luke: Jesus' compassion for sinners. Early manuscripts of John's Gospel do not contain this text; scholars believe that it was added later.

This text presents the familiar story of a woman caught in adultery. Because the story is so familiar, the reader may not be attentive to the opening verses. The temple area was the gathering place for the scribes, Pharisees, and those who were concerned with matters of the law. While they are portrayed in the gospels as being opponents of Jesus, the gospels also state that Jesus ate with them--something one did only with those whom one respected. When Jesus goes into the outer area of the temple and sits down, he is acting like a scribe. They regularly would sit and offer their comments on the law to students who gathered about their favorite teacher.

Adultery was an offense against the honor of a husband. A husband could accuse his wife, but a wife could not accuse her husband. But according to the book of Deuteronomy, both the man and woman should be punished. "If a man is discovered having relations with a woman who is married to another, both the man and woman with whom he has had relations shall die. Thus shall you purge the evil from your midst." (Deuteronomy 22:22) But generally, the woman bore the blame and punishment. According to the Hebrew law, she could be stoned to death if she were a woman who was betrothed (age 12-14), and strangled if she were a married woman.

The law also prescribed that the witnesses of the offense should be the ones to begin the execution. However, according to Roman law, the Hebrew people did not have the authority to execute anyone. Those who brought this woman to Jesus had set a trap. The crowd would be alienated if Jesus spoke against a legitimate part of the Mosaic tradition. But if he supported the stoning of this woman, then he would contradict his previous teaching about forgiveness, and would place himself above the Roman law that reserved imposing a death sentence for itself.

The woman herself is being treated as a pawn for a debate about the law. Those who have brought her into the temple area do not care about what happens to her, nor about her reputation. In contrast, Jesus seems to be more concerned with her than anything else. Other attempts to trap Jesus have left those setting the trap embarrassed and discredited. However, here he does not seem to be concerned with them either. Instead of responding to them, he remains silent and begins to doodle on the ground, a common practice for those pondering a situation. This places the burden of what to do with the woman on those who brought her forward. According to the law, the witnesses are responsible for being the first to carry out the execution. But they are unwilling to do so, and eventually they, and the crowd, abandon the woman. It is only then, when Jesus is alone with the woman, that he speaks with her. He neither condones what she has done nor treats her as a public sinner. "Then Jesus straightened up and said to her, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' She replied, 'No one, sir.' Then Jesus said, 'neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin anymore.'" (John 8:10-11)

Reflection Questions:

1. Can you recall a time when you were caught “red handed” doing something you should not have been doing? What was the situation? What were some of the thoughts and feelings going through you at the time? How did the person who discovered you treat you?
2. Have you ever been made a public example of behavior that was not acceptable? (In the classroom, at church, in sports, or at work?)
3. What is your reaction to the fact that Jesus is in the temple sitting among the scribes?
4. Do you know people who seem to make “obeying the law,” or “the rule,” the measure of what is acceptable behavior?
5. How big of a part do “rules” and “laws” play in your personal life?
6. Do you have private sins that, if exposed, would embarrass you to the point that you would not want to be seen in public or in church?
7. What do you think was the experience of this woman when she was caught? What was her experience of being with Jesus that day?
8. What does this gospel say to you about the kind of church Jesus would like us to be?
9. Can you talk to God about this gospel and your own feelings about the day when you will come face to face with God?

The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.loom@gmail.com

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscc-calledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

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Excerpts from the readings for April 3, 2022, the Fifth Sunday of Lent

Thus says the Lord, who opens a way in the sea and a path in the mighty waters, who leads out chariots and horsemen, a powerful army, till they lie prostrate together, never to rise, snuffed out like a wick. Remember not the events of the past, the things of long ago consider not; I am doing something new! Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? In the desert I make a way, in the wasteland, rivers. Wild beasts honor me, jackals and ostriches, for I put water in the desert and rivers in the wasteland for my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself, that they might announce my praise.

The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.
When the Lord brought back the captives of Zion, we were like men dreaming.
Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with rejoicing.

Then they said among the nations, "The Lord has done great things for them." Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like the torrents in the southern desert. Those that sow in tears shall reap rejoicing. Although they go forth weeping, carrying the seed to be sown, they shall come back rejoicing, carrying their sheaves.

Brothers and sisters: I consider everything as a loss because of the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have accepted the loss of all things and I consider them so much rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having any righteousness of my own based on the law but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God, depending on faith to know him and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by being conformed to his death, if I may attain the resurrection. 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, since I have indeed been taken possession of by Christ Jesus. Brothers and sisters, I for my part do not consider myself to have taken possession. Just one thing: 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.

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Early in the morning he arrived again in the temple area, and the people started coming to him, and he sat down and taught them. Then the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery and made her stand in the middle. They said to him, "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?" They said this to test him, so that they could have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and began to write on the ground with his finger. But when they continued asking him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." Again he bent down and wrote on the ground. They went away one by one, beginning with the elders. So he was left alone with the woman. He said to her, "Woman, has no one condemned you?" She replied, "No one, sir." Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go, and do not sin anymore."

Excerpts from Isaiah 43:16-21; Psalm 126:1-6; Philippians 3:8-14; and John 8:1-11

From Joe:

Friends,

Here are the gospel background and reflection questions for April 3rd, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. On this fifth Sunday of Lent, the Gospel from John is the story of the woman caught in adultery, who is brought before Jesus by scribes and Pharisees. They ask, "Moses said we should stone such women. What do you say?" They intended to use his response to bring some charge against him. Instead they find things are different with Jesus than with the law of Moses, which not only prescribed stoning, but that the witnesses to the sin should throw first. Jesus' new alternative is, "The one among you who is without sin, throw first." They all went away; nor did Jesus condemn the woman.

The other readings also have references to new ways, forgetting the past, and the benevolence and compassion of God. In the first reading from Isaiah, the Lord says, "Remember not the events of the past. See, I am doing something new. I make a way for my chosen people." Psalm 126 proclaims, "The Lord has done great things for us. Restore our fortunes, O Lord. Those that go forth weeping shall come back rejoicing." In the second reading, from the letter to the Philippians, Paul writes, "Not having any righteousness of my own based on the law, but righteousness through Christ from God, I continue toward the goal, forgetting what lies behind, straining to what lies ahead."

Joe

> i < May the Word light your way each day!