

Scripture Study

Fifth Sunday of Lent – Cycle C



Opening prayer

Isaiah 43:16-21

(Ps 126:1-6)

Philippians 3:8-14

John 8:1-11

Overview of the Gospel:

- Some ancient manuscripts of John omit the episode we see in this Sunday's Gospel reading, while some place it elsewhere in John's Gospel or in Luke. It has been defined by the Church as canonical and thus inspired Scripture.
- The setting is the Jerusalem temple during the Jewish feast of Tabernacles (or Booths), a harvest feast occurring in September which recalled God's providence to Israel during their forty years of wandering in the desert. During the seven days of the feast, Jews would build and live in small tents, or booths, to commemorate that time.
- Jesus' opponents bring before him a woman who they say has been caught in the act of adultery. They demand a judgment from him, not because they respect his opinion, but as a device to trap him. If he tells them to stone her, he would be liable to Roman law which reserved the death penalty to itself (see John 18:31). If he orders them to let her go, he will be seen as condoning sin and going against Moses (Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:23-24).
- Jesus chooses neither option, instead skillfully turning the question back on his accusers while at the same time demonstrating both mercy and justice.

Questions:

- How is this situation a trap for Jesus? What would the Pharisees accuse Jesus of if he told them to let her go? If he told them to stone her? How does he spring the trap (verse 7)?
- How would the woman just caught in adultery have felt? What was the significance of Jesus' question in verse 10?
- How does Jesus' response to the woman exemplify "grace and truth" (John 1:17)? How does Jesus demonstrate by his words and actions that God is doing a "new thing" with the coming of the kingdom (see the First Reading)?
- How does the way Jesus treated this woman help you face your sins?
- Jesus accepts you "as is." Does that free you to change, or does it support your bad behavior? How so?
- What can you learn from Jesus about helping a friend who has fallen?

Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 1846—48; 1441—42

Closing prayer

Lord, can it be that you favor sinners? Assuredly not. See what follows: 'Go and sin no more.' Therefore, the Lord also condemned sin, but not the woman. — St. Augustine

Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass Scripture readings!

"Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again"

Gospel Reading: *John 8:1-11*

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Early in the morning he came again to the temple; all the people came to him, and he sat down and taught them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst they said to him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such. What do you say about her?" This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her." And once more he bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. But when they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the eldest, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus looked up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again."

Meditation: Are you ready to be changed and transformed in Christlike holiness? God never withholds his grace from us. His steadfast love and mercy is new every day (Lamentations 3:22-23). Through the gift and grace of the Holy Spirit we can be changed and made new in Christ. He can set us free from our unruly desires and passions. Jesus never lost an



opportunity to bring freedom to those oppressed by sin and guilt. His frequent association with sinners, however, upset the sensibilities of the religious leaders. When a woman caught in adultery was brought to them for trial, they confronted Jesus on the issue of retribution. Jewish law treated adultery as a serious crime since it violated God's ordinance and wreaked havoc on the stability of marriage and family life. It was one of the three gravest sins punishable by death.

This incident tells us a great deal about Jesus' attitude to the sinner. The scribes and Pharisees wanted to entrap Jesus with the religious and civil authorities. That is why they brought a woman caught in adultery before Jesus. Jesus turned the challenge towards his accusers. In effect he said: Go ahead and stone her! But let the man who is without sin be the first to cast a stone. The Lord leaves the matter

to their own consciences. When the adulterous woman is left alone with Jesus, he both expresses mercy and he strongly exhorts her to not sin again. The scribes wished to condemn, Jesus wished to forgive and to restore the sinner to health. His challenge involved a choice – either go back to your former way of sin and death or to reach out to the new way of life and happiness with him. Jesus gave her pardon and a new start on life. God's grace enables us to confront our sin for what it is – unfaithfulness to God, and to turn back to God with a repentant heart and a thankful spirit for God's mercy and forgiveness. Do you know the joy of repentance and a clean conscience?

"God our Father, we find it difficult to come to you, because our knowledge of you is imperfect. In our ignorance we have imagined you to be our enemy; we have wrongly thought that you take pleasure in punishing our sins; and we have foolishly conceived you to be a tyrant over human life. But since Jesus came among us, he has shown that you are loving, that you are on our side against all that stunts life, and that our resentment against you was groundless. So we come to you, asking you to forgive our past ignorance, and wanting to know more and more of you and your forgiving love, through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Prayer of Saint Augustine)

Meditation: © 2010 Don Schwager
www.rc.net/wcc/readings