

Father O'Connor's Homily for 3 April 2022  
Fifth Sunday of Lent-C

Isaiah 43: 16-21  
Philippians 3: 8-14  
John 8: 1-11

Today's Gospel is included in one of the flashback scenes in the movie, "The Passion of the Christ." A woman who had been caught in the act of adultery was brought to Jesus by the Scribes and the Pharisees. And they asked Him: "Now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?"

The Gospel goes on to tell us that "they said this to test Him, so that they could have some charge to bring against Him." Here is the three-pronged trap they were setting. 1) If Jesus said that the woman ought to be stoned to death, He would lose His reputation for love and for mercy, and He would never again be called "the friend of sinners." 2) He would also come into collision with Roman law, for the Jews had no power to pass or carry out a death sentence on anyone. 3) And if instead Jesus said that the woman should be pardoned, He would be teaching people to break the law of Moses.

So "Jesus bent down and began to write on the ground with His finger."

Why did He do this? I will offer you three theories, all of which are plausible.

The first theory says that Jesus did this to buy some time. It is like when we say, "Would you please repeat the question?" He wanted to think things over in prayer, so He took some time to draw on the ground with His finger.

The second theory is that He wanted the Scribes and the Pharisees to keep on talking so that maybe they would realize just how cruel they were being to this woman, and perhaps talk themselves out of it.

The third theory – and this is the one I like best – says that Jesus began writing down the sins of her accusers. And this gives a lot of punch to Jesus' statement, "Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." Then He resumed His writing. "And they went away one by one, beginning with the elders."

The Gospel then says that "He was left alone with the woman before Him." And He said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one

condemned you?” And she replied, “No one, sir.” Then Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin any more.”

This incident shows how cruel the Scribes and the Pharisees could be to people. To them she was nothing but a case of shameless adultery. To them she had no name, no personality, no feelings. She was simply a pawn in the game they were playing to try to destroy Jesus.

Jesus is showing us how we should treat people who have done wrong: with compassionate pity and mercy. As is said of doctors, “frequently to heal, often to bring relief, but always to deliver compassion.”

As human beings, we are often tempted to hold other people to a higher standard than we live by. We sometimes criticize the faults of other people, when those same faults are glaringly part of our own lives.

We must always extend to others the same compassionate pity and mercy that we would like to have extended to us, if we were in their shoes.

Notice that Jesus did not say that her sin was not serious or that it was no big deal. It was serious and a very big deal. Rather, Jesus forgave her and said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin any more.”

Jesus gave her a second chance. It is as if Jesus told her: “I know that you have made a mess of things. But your life is not finished yet. I am giving you another chance, and I will help you do better. At the end of the day, we will see how you have lived.”

Here was no “easy forgiveness.” Here was a challenge which pointed this sinner to a life of goodness that she had never dreamed to be possible for her. Jesus was teaching all of us that sinners have it within them to become the saints that He enables us to be with His merciful grace.

And this involves a warning – unspoken but clearly implied. Jesus confronted this woman with an eternal choice that day: either to go back to her old ways of sin or to reach out to this new way of life with Him.

Her story is unfinished, for every life is unfinished until, at long last, we will each stand before God for judgement.

And so today, let us pray the classic “Jesus Prayer” earnestly: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”