

We come together today to celebrate this 5th Sunday of Lent. Next Sunday is Palm Sunday already! And, we will focus our attention on Holy Week and the great celebration of the Resurrection.

In our Gospel today we hear about a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. Can you imagine how that woman felt? She was caught breaking the sixth commandment. She was made to stand in front of this crowd of people. She was forced to face the results of her sin in front of this crowd. She was ashamed of herself, expected to die and probably wanted to die. And no, she was not Mary Magdalene!

There she was, ridiculed by the religious leader of her society. As far as they were concerned, she was dirt. They would consider themselves defiled by just being in her presence.

And Jesus bent down and began to write on the ground with his finger. He put himself in a position where he would not see either her or her accusers. And the woman, standing in her shame, experienced the Compassion and Mercy of our God. With the awe-inspiring dynamism of his presence, with the sheer power of his Love, he caused the Scribes and Pharisees to back down. Jesus saved the woman's physical life and then told her to preserve her spiritual life. "Neither do I accuse you, go and sin no more." The loving energy that defused that murderous mob had to overwhelm this woman.

Like this woman, full of shame, full of sin, we depend on the Healing Power of our Merciful and Compassionate Lord. There are none of us who can say unequivocally that we have never sinned, at least any of us that have any semblance of a conscience. All of us, though can say, that we are forgiven. And we can stand before the Lord, not in the hypocritical arrogance of the scribes and Pharisees, but in the humility of the woman who had been forgiven.

There are three lessons for us to learn from this gospel story;

1. God loves me unconditionally.
2. God forgives me.
3. God is always with me.

God forgives us because he loves each of us and because he has a plan for each of us. If you love someone you cannot bear seeing that person in pain. The pain of the soul hurts much more than physical pain. Jesus knows that. He suffers with us when we ache inside our selves, when we realize what our sins have done to others, and, ultimately, to our selves. God gave the apostles and through them the Church the power to absolve sinners, to cleanse us from our sins, the power to free us from our pain through the great Sacrament of Reconciliation.

And then, when we are freely forgiven by the Lord, we are called upon to freely forgive those who may have harmed us in any way.

And when we are forgiven we don't really care if there are people standing behind us holding stones.

It may surprise you to hear me say that the theme of joy comes up a lot during Lent. We tend to think of Lent as a solemn time: with prescribed days of fasting and abstinence, examination of conscience and confession of sin, Stations of the Cross and meditation on the passion. All of that is part and parcel of Lent, yet the goal of this is not to make us unhappy. Just the opposite - the goal is joy.

St. Thomas Aquinas said, “No man can live without joy. That is why one deprived of spiritual joy goes over to carnal pleasures.”

No one can live without joy. If you and I do not experience joy in God - in spiritual things – we will start looking somewhere else: food, sex, mind-changing drugs, alcohol, gambling, you name it. While these things are not bad in themselves, they do not bring a joy that lasts. And all of them can be abused, that is, we can pursue them in a way that brings destruction – to oneself and to others.

St. Augustine said that in the end only two remained: Misery and Mercy.

The women in the story represents human misery and Jesus embodies the mercy of God. Jesus transformed her misery to pure joy.

We are only seven days from Holy Week. As we enter Holy Week, a good person to walk with is the woman rescued by Jesus. She joined her own pain to the suffering of Jesus. And she, perhaps more than most others, knew the great joy of forgiveness. Jesus transformed her misery into pure joy. He wants to do the same for you and me. He wants to give us joy now. With her we can pray the beautiful words of today’s Psalm: “The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.”