

### **Homily for 5th Sunday of Lent, April 3**

**The gospel passage we just read is the first several verses from Chapter eight of the Gospel According to John. Scribes and Pharisees bring a woman caught in Adultery to Him for judgement. They do so to trap Him. If she is shown mercy, He is going against the Torah, the Law of Moses. If He sentences her to death according to the Law, He can be accused of taking upon Himself the authority the Romans have taken away from the Jewish Leaders – the authority to sentence someone to death.**

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**In the New American Bible, which is the English Translation used for most of our readings at Mass, there are several footnotes offered to help the readers of the bible. Some of the footnotes for this reading are of more interest academically, but they are worth playing with today.**

**The first thing mentioned about this whole event with the woman brought before Our Lord is that it is missing from all the earliest Greek copies of the New Testament that we have. It was definitely in the Latin Vulgate, translated by Saint Jerome, who died in the year Four Hundred-Twenty (420). Also, in the ancient manuscripts we have, this event is found in various places either here in John, or instead in the Gospel According to Luke.**

**The Church does consider this authentically part of Scripture. It is extremely interesting that this event in Our Lord's ministry was something so important that the early Christians held onto it and wanted to make sure was not lost. It was needed to give us an insight into Jesus Christ.**

**This encounter contains one of the most succinct lines we know for God's desire to both forgive us and yet call us to a greater, more holy life.**

**“Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin any more.”**

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**Those who brought the woman before Jesus refer to what the Torah, the Law, teaches should be done to one caught in adultery.**

The footnotes mention a few passages. Fr. Paul Gallagher, a Franciscan, (OFM) expands on this by saying:

“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...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.”

One of the questions that we find ourselves asking if she was caught in the act of adultery is: Where is the man?

The Law required two witnesses, exclusive of the husband. And one of our footnotes reminds us that the first stones were to be thrown by the witnesses. So, they should be above reproach. Again, why did they not identify the man and have him here also? Was this perhaps set up by a jealous husband?

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Into this, we are also told - twice - that Jesus bent down and wrote on the ground when asked to pronounce an opinion in this case. That has produced much speculation throughout the centuries. What did Jesus write?

Here is a summary of some possibilities, from Father Raymond Brown’s commentary on the Gospel according to Saint John.

One - A tradition going back to the fifth century is that Jesus wrote the sins of the accusers. The rest of possibilities assume that is the accusers Jesus is passing judgement on.

Two - In Roman legal practice the judge first wrote the sentence and then read it aloud. Thus, it may be that Jesus’ first writing is the sentence He would deliver, then the second writing is what he would say in our final verse.

Three – If Jesus is writing a judgement, there is a parallel with the handwriting on the wall in Daniel chapter five.

Four – Jesus is acting out a verse in Jeremiah Chapter Seventeen (17:13), ““Those who turn away from thee shall be written in the earth, for they have forsaken the LORD, the fountain of living water.”

**Five – Jesus wrote the words from Exodus (23:1), “You shall not join hands with a wicked man (to be a malicious witness).”**

**Six – Jesus was simply tracing lines on the ground while he was thinking, or wished to show imperturbability, or to contain His feelings of disgust for the violent zeal shown by the accusers.**

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**To quote Fr. Brown further, regarding our Lord’s words:**

**“Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.”**

*“...Jesus is not saying that every magistrate must be sinless to judge others, a principal that would nullify the office of judge. He is dealing here with zealots who have taken upon themselves the indignant enforcement of the Law and he has every right to demand that their case be thoroughly lawful and their motives be honest. He recognizes that, although they are zealous for the word of the Law, they are not interested in the purpose of the Law, for the spiritual state of the woman is not even in question, or whether or not she is penitent.*

*“Moreover, Jesus knows that they are using her as a pawn to entrap him. Even further...the husband of the woman may have cynically arranged to have her caught by carefully prearranging that there be witnesses to her sin, instead of seeking to win back her love. The base motives of the judges, the husband, and the witnesses are not according to the Law, and Jesus had every right to challenge their attempt to secure the woman’s conviction.”*

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**This is not just a story where Christ cleverly gets out of another test and trap by the authorities. This is Our Lord being less concerned with the those seeking to destroy Him than with the person in front of Him who needs His healing. We need His healing.**

**Jesus is the gospel – the Good News. He is ever new. In Him we can be given eyes to see the God who is ever offering forgiveness and life to those in both the**

**old and New Testament. It is an offer for forgiveness and the ability to forgive. It is the offer of God Himself to reside in our hearts and minds and lives.**

**As Pope Francis said of Lent – This is the Opportune Time. God’s newness is not just approaching at Easter, but is available for us now in Lent, as we continue to prepare for Easter.**

**God – ever the same – is ever new for us. The same old lesson is always being learned for the first time. The heart is made new, even if it be for the Seventy-Seventh time.**

**Repent and Believe in the Gospel.**

**“Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin any more.”**

**My brothers and Sisters: This is His invitation to us always, this is His invitation to us today.**