

GOSPEL*John 8:1-11*

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. At daybreak he appeared in the Temple again; and as all the people came to him, he sat down and began to teach them.

The scribes and Pharisees brought a woman along who had been caught committing adultery; and making her stand there in full view of everybody, they said to Jesus, 'Master, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery, and Moses has ordered us in the Law to condemn women like this to death by stoning. What have you to say?' They asked him this as a test, looking for something to use against him. But Jesus bent down and started writing on the ground with his finger. As they persisted with their question, he looked up and said, 'If there is one of you who has not sinned, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.' Then he bent down and wrote on the ground again. When they heard this they went away one by one, beginning with the eldest, until Jesus was left alone with the woman, who remained standing there. He looked up and said, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' 'No one, sir,' she replied. 'Neither do I condemn you,' said Jesus 'go away, and don't sin any more.'

HOMILY OF ST JOHN PAUL II*1 April 2001 (Excerpt)*

"Woman ... has no one condemned you? ... neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again" (Jn 8: 10-11). Jesus is newness of life for those who open their hearts and, after acknowledging their sins, receive his saving mercy. In today's Gospel text, the Lord offers this gift of his love to the adulteress, who is forgiven and restored to her full human and spiritual dignity. He also offers it to her accusers, but their spirit remains closed and impenetrable.

Here is an invitation to meditate on the paradoxical refusal of his merciful love. It is as though the trial against Jesus were already beginning, a trial that we will relive in a few days during the events of his

Passion: it will result in his unjust sentence to death on the cross. On the one hand, the redeeming love of Christ, freely offered to everyone; on the other, the closure of those who, moved by envy, seek a motive to kill him. Accused even of opposing the Law, Jesus is "put to the test": if he absolves the woman caught in flagrant adultery, it will be said that he has transgressed the precepts of Moses; if he condemns her, it will be said that he is inconsistent with his message of mercy towards sinners.

But Jesus does not fall into the trap. By his silence he invites everyone to self-reflection. On the one hand, he invites the woman to acknowledge the wrong committed; on the other, he invites her accusers not to shrink from an examination of conscience: "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her" (Jn 8: 7).

The woman's situation is certainly serious. But the message flows precisely from this situation: in whatever condition we find ourselves, we can always open ourselves to conversion and receive forgiveness for our sins. "Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again" (Jn 8: 11). On Calvary, by the supreme sacrifice of his life, the Messiah will seal for every man and woman the infinite gift of God's pardon and mercy.

"I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (Phil 3: 8).

To know Christ! On this last stage of our Lenten journey we are encouraged even more by the liturgy to deepen our knowledge of Jesus, to contemplate his suffering and merciful face, and to prepare ourselves to experience the splendour of his resurrection. We cannot remain on the surface. We must have a deep, personal experience of the richness of Christ's love. Only in this way, as the Apostle says, can we "know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible [we] may attain the resurrection from the dead" (Phil 3: 10).

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Like Paul, every Christian is on a journey; the Church is on a journey. Let us not stop, brothers and sisters, or slow our pace. On the contrary, let us strive with all our strength for the goal to which God calls us. Let us run towards Easter, now close at hand. May Mary, the Virgin of the Way, guide and accompany us with her protection. May she, the Virgin whom you venerate here as "Our Lady of Suffrage", intercede for us now and at the hour of our death, of our final encounter with Christ. Amen!

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/ Homily?



Head: What does, "in whatever condition we find ourselves, we can always open ourselves to conversion and receive forgiveness for our sins" mean to you? Do you believe this about yourself?



Heart: St John Paul II tells us that the remedy to being like the pharisees is an examination of conscience. Have you ever felt like you condemned someone for wrongdoing? How would examining your conscience help?



Hands: So close to the end of our Lenten journey, what can we do this week to spiritually "run towards Easter, now close at hand"?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another:

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Offer prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps praying the 'Glory Be'.