

Encountering the Spirit

Week 5: The Temple

Opening prayer

By your help, we beseech you, Lord our God, may we walk eagerly in that same charity with which, out of love for the world, your Son handed himself over to death. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, you Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.

R. Amen.

(Collect for Fifth Sunday of Lent)

Review

Is there anything you would like to share about the previous week?



The Word of God is also the beacon that guides the synodal journey that has begun throughout the Church. As we strive to listen to each other with attention and discernment — because it is not about conducting an inquiry on opinions, no, but about discerning the Word, there — let us listen together to the Word of God and to the Holy Spirit.

*Pope Francis Angelus
January 20221*

Scripture

John 8: 1-11 'Let the one among you who has not sinned be the first to throw a stone'

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 alone 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 do not sin any more.'



Synodal Pathway

"By journeying together and reflecting together on the journey that has been made, the Church will be able to learn through her experience which processes can help her to live communion, to achieve participation, to open herself to mission." (Synod Preparatory Document, I)



Reflection

Jesus, we know, is always present to us and loves us unconditionally. However, there are times when we need to expose ourselves to this truth, that Jesus loves and accepts us just as we are right now. Imagine for a moment that Jesus is standing before you, looking at you lovingly and humbly. We might initially feel a little unsettled and unworthy at this thought and then gradually feel comforted, held and restored. As a child our immediate reaction to any wrongdoing may have been one of feeling guilty, or even denial. As an adult faith takes root, we discover that we are invited to enjoy a personal relationship with Jesus. Despite our failings that sense of being the recipient of unmerited love and compassion changes the our narrative and life. In the same way the woman accused of adultery, standing before Jesus, is being held by that same gaze of unconditional love, one offered to us all.

We all need to grow in our experience of God's amazing love for us, so that we can know ourselves to be fully accepted by God just as we are, and so grow in our ability to accept and love ourselves fully. One of the key difficulties for the pilgrim is that we can get held back by the faults that we have, or think that we have. This does not mean that we do not want to get better: we all want to fulfill our purpose as a human being in relationship with God, yet we tend to beat ourselves up when we fall short. That is where focusing on the final words of this gospel passage can help: 'go away, and do not sin any more.'

This is a reminder that Jesus was well aware that the accusation made was true, letting her go with the injunction not to do so again. Jesus spoke to her heart as he does ours. Jesus response to the woman changes her heart and direction in life leading to a feer, fuller life lived for God and others.

When Pope Francis announced the Year of Mercy in 2015 he said "The mercy of God is not an abstract idea, but a concrete reality with which he reveals his love as of

that of a father or a mother, moved to the very depths out of love for their child" (Misericordiae Vultus 6). We are fortunate, that like the woman taken in adultery, t our fate is in the hands of God and not of the self-righteous.

One of the most distasteful aspects of this story is that she simply did not matter to her accusers, given no name and becomes a religious pawn in the scheme of the pharisees and scribes. Her only value is as a means of their trapping Jesus, the one who will address her as a human being, not an object, or a sin. It a passage that merits being read often, a reminder as Pope Francis said of this passage 'God does not nail us to our sin' (Angelus March 2016). Instead we are set free. It is a loving and unmerited action.

Jesus forgives and goes beyond the Law that expected her to be punished. He certainly doesn't say that her adultery is not a sin, but he goes beyond it: Jesus is merciful. Like her, we often deserve to be condemned, but instead we are forgiven.

For "God doesn't forgive with a decree but with a caress". He forgives by "caressing the wounds caused by our sins, because he is involved in forgiveness, is involved in our salvation" (Pope Francis, Homily 7th April 2014).

Our whole Lenten journey has been focused on changing direction, in our lives and in our relationship to Jesus. God is concerned about our sins and weaknesses in order to love us into changing our heart and direction, so that are life may be full and lived in relationship with Him and others. The point of the Church's choice of this passage on the forgiving of the adulterous woman as the gospel reading for this Sunday's Mass could not be more obvious at this stage in Lent: God's forgiveness is always available' (Jack Mahoney SJ Thinking Faith 17th March 2010).

by Deacon Roger Carr-Jones

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus
I give you my hands to do your work
I give you my feet to go your way
I give you my eyes to see as you do
I give you my tongue to speak your words
I give you my mind that you may think in me
I give you my spirit that you may pray in me
Above all, I give you my heart
that you may love in me
your Father and all mankind
I give you my whole self that you may grow in me
so that it is you Lord Jesus
who live and work and pray in me. Amen
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QUESTION

What has spoken to you today in the scripture and reflection? Where have you experienced either an oasis moment, being really listened to, or had an unexpected conversation that has reshaped your journey?

POINT FOR ACTION

Discerning as a group, from everything you have shared in this time together, how can we more effectively bring the life-giving power of the gospel to a world so desperately in need of it?

