

Fifth Sunday of Lent 2019

My beloved brothers and sisters, in the Law of Moses, the three greatest sins were: Idolatry, Murder and Adultery. Each of these sins required the death penalty. Idolatry and Adultery were punished by stoning to death, murder was punished by the sword. The woman in today's gospel was caught in the very act of Adultery; and the Pharisees know it. She is liable to punishment of stoning to death; and she knows it. However, even in the time of Jesus, it was only in the rarest instances that a person was stoned to death for adultery. Furthermore, the man who committed the Adultery was just as liable- so, where is the man? Nonetheless, she knows that she cannot escape the shame and the danger of death by stoning, she has no recourse! She is expecting the death penalty; she is not expecting a second chance.

Furthermore, we do not understand the gospel unless we understand how underhanded these men are who throw her down in front of Jesus and humiliate her- they are not so interested in the death of this woman, as they are in entrapping Jesus by His words: if He says stone her, then He loses credibility for His lack of compassion; if He says don't stone her, He loses credibility because He speaks contrary to the Law of God! They don't care about the woman at all; they just want to use her. Imagine her shame and fear. Imagine how she must have wanted to crawl into a hole in the ground and disappear. Imagine the mocking of the crowd gathered for this spectacle!

But Jesus does the opposite of their expectations. He turns the tables on them, and even upon her own expectations. Here is the Divine Judge. St. Ignatius tells us that when Jesus wrote upon the ground, He was writing all of their sins on the ground. All have sinned, and all are in the absolute necessity of God's Divine Mercy. When Jesus looks upon this poor woman, this poor soul, He sees what St. Paul says in Ephesians 2:10: "You are God's masterpiece..."; we have the greatest of dignities, because we have been created in the image and likeness of God- and nothing, nothing can erase that, not even the greatest of sins and Jesus has come to restore it!

St. Augustine reminds us that in Jesus, our greatest misery meets the greatest mercy, (*Maximum misericordia maximis miseriis occurrat in Iesu*). St. John Paul the great teaches us: “We are not the sum of our weaknesses and failures; we are the sum of the Father’s love for us and the real capacity to become the image of His Son.” That is why Jesus says to the woman: “Go and sin no more!”; not to humiliate her further, rather, to now live in Mercy as Mercy! Jesus challenges her to become a Saint! He does this for each one of us as well, regardless of how great our sins may be. It is an invitation to a new life in Him; and with His power, we can live in Mercy, and be Mercy for others. If we have been so infinitely forgive, then we must do the same for others; no matter how long it takes, with His grace, we can be His grace for others!