

5th Sunday of Lent, Year C

GOSPEL

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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 do not sin anymore.'

(John 8:1-11)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- Pilgrims who came to Jerusalem for the great festivals and who could not find lodging in the city often stayed the night on the Mount of Olives, just outside the city gates.
- On the Mount of Olives is a garden area called Gethsemane, which means 'oil press' in Hebrew.
- The Mount of Olives offered a spectacular view across to the temple.
- The death penalty for adultery is stipulated in both the book of Leviticus (20:10) and in Deuteronomy (22:22), but both these texts make clear that both parties should be thus punished. In this text, the man is missing.

EXPLORING THE WORD

This gospel combines the themes that have been emerging during Lent: the goodness and mercy of God and the need for repentance. It is an interesting exercise to concentrate on the woman in this story. She is dragged in by the religious authorities to be used as a 'thing' to test Jesus. In this early phase of the encounter, Jesus does not look at the woman or acknowledge her presence but addresses his response to the crowd and to the scribes and Pharisees. It is only after they have left the scene in shame that he turns his attention to the woman and establishes personal contact with her, confirming that she is a human person and not a 'thing'. The intimacy of his address to her as 'Woman' echoes the term he uses in addressing his mother (John 2:4, John 19:26). Jesus neither condemns nor condones. He simply accepts the woman as she is and invites her to a new life. It is acceptance and love that allows repentance and change to occur in others.

- Have you had the experience of being unconditionally loved and accepted by another?
- Who are those people in your life who you love and accept unconditionally?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- Have you ever been too hasty in your judgment and condemnation of others?
- Have you ever been forgiven by someone for an offence you committed against them? How did you feel?
- What do you think Jesus wrote on the ground? The text does not tell us. What might it have been?
- Are there times or situations when you find yourself being judgmental or self-righteous? What is the best corrective to this attitude? Have you ever experienced the condemnation of others? How did you feel? Share your reflections.
- Is there someone who is on the outer to whom you can offer support this week?
- Use the psalm response as your prayer this week:

*The Lord has done great things for us;
we are filled with joy.*

SHARING THE TRADITION

A closer look at the Scripture of the day, to see how it makes more explicit God's word to us through the teachings of Jesus Christ

Last week, you explored understandings of sin. Turning away from sin requires a conversion of the heart (CCC, §1430).

Interior repentance is a radical reorientation of our whole life, a return, a conversion to God with all our heart, an end of sin, a turning away from evil ... At the same time, it entails the desire and resolution to change one's life, with hope in God's mercy and trust in the help of his grace.

(CCC, §1431).

- What does it mean to orient our whole lives towards God?

Baptism is the principal place for the first and fundamental conversion. It is by faith in the Gospel and by Baptism that one renounces evil and gains salvation, that is the forgiveness of all sins and the gift of new life.

(CCC, §1427)

- As the elect approach their baptism or reception, how are they feeling about the new orientation of their lives?

Being a Christian demands constant re-conversion. Often we fail to live up to the promise of our new life, so we need to undergo many experiences of conversion to orient ourselves again to God.

- You could discuss the conversion experiences of great figures in the Church (for example, Paul, Augustine, Francis of Assisi, Teresa of Avila, Dorothy Day or Thomas Merton).
- In what ways does the life of the Church assist us to continually nourish our orientation towards God?

SYMBOLS AND IMAGES

The question posed to Jesus by the Pharisees was meant to trick him. If he condoned her stoning, the act would break Roman law; if he refused to condone it, he would be holding religious law in contempt. In his response, God, in Jesus, is offering a new way. He does not condemn the sinner but invites her to leave her past behind and begin again. This imagery of forgiveness is consistent throughout the Lenten readings.

LIVING THE WORD

Practical ideas for group leaders to employ in connecting Scripture and daily life, with suggestions for music and environment

- How does your parish community constantly renew its orientation towards God? Is there a pastoral planning team that steers this process? What suggestions can be made to assist the elect to keep renewing their orientation to God in the future?
- You could use some stones and a cross as a focus for prayer. Pray for the ongoing conversion of each of the elect. A suitable song could be 'Return to God' (GA 304). Conclude with the prayer of exorcism for the third scrutiny in the RCIA at §162A.

NOTES

Series of horizontal dotted lines for taking notes.