



Holy Week is drawing near. In fact, just a week from today is Palm Sunday and the following Sunday is Easter. The Gospel text for this final Lenten Sunday before Palm Sunday focuses on the power of God's mercy to those who have strayed. Indeed, the three last Sundays of Lent in this year Jesus's teaching is about Mercy.

Scribes and Pharisees are eager to see the response of Jesus in the face of the sin of adultery, considered a cause for death by stoning according to the prevailing Law. Seeking a chance to trap Jesus in his response to the situation, the Lord refuses to pass any judgment. In fact, Jesus simply stoops down and starts writing with his finger in the ground. What did he write? We don't know, but the gesture was a way of saying without words that Jesus was unwilling to discuss the matter with the accusers. The silence of Jesus in this instance becomes an outright condemnation of the hypocrisy of the faultfinders. Jesus does speak some words to the accusers, though, well known to us now: "Let the man among you who has no sin be the first to cast a stone at her." In response, the hypocritical audience drifts away one by one, until no one is left, only the woman and Jesus.

The woman did not make an escape when the others did, but stayed put, presumably because she would be further hounded by the accusers if she had left the rabble. By her stance, she opened up the possibility of experiencing the mercy she no doubt desired. Jesus utters no condemnation, but only a word of advice and encouragement: "You may go," he says, "but from now on, avoid this sin." By his response, Jesus not only saved the life of the woman, but also made her realize her true condition and the need for conversion.

Perhaps, the Pharisees thought that Christ would condemn her immediately. They thought he would give them permission to go ahead and stone the woman to death. However, they were wrong because Christ came to save and not to condemn. They were wrong because the ways and thoughts of Christ are different from theirs. So, instead of condemning her, Jesus restored her life and offered her a new chance to live. He simply told her: "Go and sin no more."

Notice Jesus' last words to the woman, "go away and do not sin anymore." Although Jesus has forgiven her sin, he expects her to live a life of grace and union with God from now on by not sinning anymore. Jesus doesn't say that sin does not matter because sin does matter and damages our relationship with God. So, Jesus says, "go away and do not sin anymore." When we receive Jesus' forgiveness, he expects us to live as new people afterwards. That is precisely the attitude with which we are to come to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It would make no sense to come to confess our sins if we intended to continue committing the same sins again. In weakness we may commit the same sin again, but as we come to confession if we do not intend to amend our lives, then surely, we cannot say that we are truly sorry for our sins. Surely, we can only say that we are genuinely sorry for our sins if we have a firm intention not to commit sin again.

One of the reasons why our Lord could see reconciliation more beneficial than we do is because He always wished to bring us a new life. If two parties do not reconcile, everything remains stagnant, and they cannot find any life and hope in their relationship. Our Lord wants to show us the way out of those paths of death and bring us new life by daring to lead God's people away from the land of slavery/Egypt. Here's how the Lord describes that new approach to us in today's First Reading, "See, I am doing something new!"

Like this woman, Jesus is always giving us new opportunities despite our weaknesses. He knows how vulnerable we are to sin. He knows the forces we contend with in our life and society. His mission is to save us from all our sins and accusations. It is not to condemn us. Hence, Christ says, "I have come that they may have life and have it in full".

Today, we should be encouraged by these words of Jesus "Neither do I condemn you." The complete forgiveness of Christ is incredible. When he says these words to us, he means them. He means that he has taken care of our negative past. So, Christ will always fill us with Joy, which he will complete for us soon through his death and resurrection.

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