

LIVING THE GOSPEL
FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT
Mar 21, 2010



LIVING THE GOSPEL
FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT
Mar 21, 2010



Theme: "Neither do I condemn you."

Gathering Prayer

All: Father, help us to be like Christ your Son, who loved the world and died for our salvation. Inspire us by his love, guide us by his example, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

Exploring the Word

Gospel Reading: John 8:1-11

¹ ...But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. ² Early in the morning he came again to the temple; all the people came to him, and he sat down and taught them. ³ The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst ⁴ they said to him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. ⁵ Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such. What do you say about her?" ⁶ This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. ⁷ And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her." ⁸ And once more he bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. ⁹ But when they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the eldest, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. ¹⁰ Jesus looked up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" ¹¹ She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again."

Saturday 10am - 12pm at Church of The Holy Cross (room #03-06)

Contacts:

George Chee	georgejc@gmail.com
Anthony Lim	am32lim@singnet.com.sg
Ellic Hiu	fdjseno@pacific.net.sg

The Navarre Bible – Commentaries;
Living Liturgy – Liturgical Ministry, The Liturgical Press;
Emmaus Journey – www.emmausjourney.org

Gospel Notes

1-11. This passage is absent from many ancient codexes, but it was in the Vulgate when the Magisterium, at the Council of Trent, defined the canon of Sacred Scripture. Therefore, the Church regards it as canonical and inspired, and has used it and continues to use it in the liturgy. It is also included in the New Vulgate, in the same position as it occupied before.

St Augustine said that the reason doubts were raised about the passage was that it showed Jesus to be so merciful that some rigorists thought it would lead to a relaxation of moral rules-and therefore many copyists suppressed it from their manuscripts (cf. *De coniugiis adulterinis*, 2, 6).

In commenting on the episode of the woman caught in adultery Fray Luis de Granada gives these general considerations on the mercy of Christ: "Your feelings, your deeds and your words should be akin to these, if you desire to be a beautiful likeness of the Lord. And therefore the Apostle is not content with telling us to be merciful; he tells us, as God's sons, to put on 'the bowels of mercy'" (cf. Col 3:12). Imagine, then, what the world would be like if everyone arrayed themselves in this way.

"All this is said to help us understand to some degree the great abundance of the goodness and compassion of our Savior, which shine forth so clearly in these actions of his, for [...] in this life we cannot know God in himself; we can know him only through his actions. [...] But it should also be pointed out that we should never act in such a way in view of God's mercy, that we forget about his justice; nor should we attend to his justice forgetting about his mercy; for hope should have in it an element of fear, and fear an element of hope" (*Life of Jesus Christ*, 13, 4).

1. We know that on a number of occasions our Lord withdrew to the Mount of Olives to pray (cf. Jn 18:2; Lk 22:39). This place was to the east of Jerusalem; the Kidron valley (cf. Jn 18:1) divided it from the hill on which the temple was built. It had from ancient times been a place of prayer: David went there to adore God during the difficult period when Absalom was in revolt (2 Sam 15:32), and there the prophet Ezekiel contemplated the glory of Yahweh entering the temple (Ezek 43:1-4). At the foot of the hill there was a garden, called Gethsemane or "the place of the oil-press", an enclosed plot containing a plantation of olive trees. Christian tradition has treated this place with great

for the great Jewish feasts. (Cf. Jn 2:13-14; 5:1, 14; 7:1, 10, 14; 8:2; 10:22-23.)

Sharing and Discussion

1. In what aspect of life do you find yourself being most judgmental?
2. How can we develop and maintain righteous judgment about things, yet insure that we don't become condemning in the way we relate to people?
3. Regarding Jesus' statement, "Neither do I condemn you," would you say that you quickly mirror this response towards others or are you usually slow in applying this attitude?

Closing Prayer

All: God of mercy and new life, you judge us with compassion and truth. Help us to repent of our sinfulness, turn from our selfish ways, and come to share in everlasting life with you. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Leader: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life.

All: Amen

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 126:1-6

¹ When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. ² Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then they said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them." ³ The LORD has done great things for us; we are glad. ⁴ Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like the watercourses in the Negeb! ⁵ May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy! ⁶ He that goes forth weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him.

Second Reading — Philippians 3:8-14

⁸ Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith; ¹⁰ that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. ¹² Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³ Brethren, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Catechism of The Catholic Church

583 – Like the prophets before him Jesus expressed the deepest respect for the Temple in Jerusalem. It was in the Temple that Joseph and Mary presented him forty days after his birth. (Lk 2:22-39.) At the age of twelve he decided to remain in the Temple to remind his parents that he must be about his Father's business. (Cf. Lk 2 46-49) He went there each year during his hidden life at least for Passover. (Cf. Lk 2:41) His public ministry itself was patterned by his pilgrimages to Jerusalem

respect and has maintained it as a place of prayer. Towards the end of the fourth century a church was built there, on whose remains the present church was built. There are still some ancient olive trees growing there, which could well derive from those of our Lord's time.

6. The question put by the scribes and Pharisees has a catch: our Lord had often shown understanding to people whom they considered sinners; they come to him now with this case to see if he will be equally indulgent-which will allow them to accuse him of infringing a very clear precept of the Law (cf. Lev 20:10)

7. Jesus' reply refers to the way stoning was carried out; those who witnessed the crime had to throw the first stones, and then others joined in, to erase the slur on the people which the crime implied (cf. Deut 17:7). The question put to Jesus was couched in legal terms; he raises it to the moral plain (the basis and justification of the legal plain), appealing to the people's conscience. He does not violate the law, St Augustine says, and at the same time he does not want to lose what he is seeking-for he has come to save that which was lost: "His answer is so full of justice, gentleness and truth. [...] O true answer of Wisdom. You have heard: Keep the Law, let the woman be stoned. But how can sinners keep the Law and punish this woman? Let each of them look inside himself and enter the tribunal of his heart and conscience; there he will discover that he is a sinner. Let this woman be punished, but not by sinners: let the Law be applied, but not by its transgressors" (St Augustine, *In Ioann. Evang.*, 33, 5).

11. The two of them were left on their own, the wretched woman and Mercy. But the Lord, having smitten them with the dart of justice, does not even deign to watch them go but turns his gaze away from them and once more writes on the ground with his finger. But when the woman was left alone and they had all gone, he lifted up his eyes to the woman. We have already heard the voice of justice; let us now hear the voice of gentleness. I think that woman was the more terrified when she heard the Lord say, 'Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her,' [...] fearing now that she would be punished by him, in whom no sin can be found. But he, who had driven away her adversaries with the tongue of justice, now looking at her with the eyes of gentleness asks her, 'Has no one condemn you?' She replies, 'No one, Lord.' And he says, 'Neither do I condemn you; I who perhaps you feared would punish you, because

in me you have not found no sin.' Lord, an it be that you favor sinners? Assuredly not. See what follows: 'Go can sin no more.' Therefore, the Lord also condemned sin, but not the woman' (St Augustine, *In Ioann. Evang.*, 33, 5-6).

Jesus, who is the Just One, does not condemn the woman; whereas these people are sinners, yet they pass sentence of death. God's infinite mercy should move us always to have compassion on those who commit sins, because we ourselves are sinners and in need of God's forgiveness.

Gospel Reflection

A common way parents deal with misbehaving children is to put them in a "time out" corner where they can cool down and (in the case of older children) think about changing their bad behavior. Often we adults need a cooling-off period when someone frustrates or angers us, so we take a walk, turn on the TV, do something different to occupy our minds. In the gospel for this Sunday about the woman caught in adultery, Jesus seems to be giving the crowd who brought the adulterous woman before him two cooling off periods; the image used is that he "bent down" and wrote "on the ground." He ignored their "test." He gave them time to think. Jesus turns the accusation away from the woman and toward her accusers, who were obstinate in the "test": "Let the one among you who is without sin . . ."

A story that begins with deathly accusation ends with divine mercy. Where the community's condemnation would have led the adulterous woman to death, Jesus' mercy leads her to new life. A story that begins with human testing of the divine ends with a divine invitation to repent. Where narrow focus on application of a law is an excuse for testing the fidelity of Jesus to Jewish covenantal law, Jesus reveals a new order in which all are called to repentance and an experience of divine mercy. Jesus' desire for us is not death but new life.

The crowd brings before Jesus a woman caught in adultery, condemns her, and demands her life. Jesus doesn't condemn the woman. He does condemn her act ("sin no more"), then calls her to repent and choose a new way of living. Lent calls us to the same kind of encounter with Jesus so that we face our own sinfulness, hear his invitation to embrace a new way of living, and make the right choice. Central to this gospel is not simply the adulterous woman or even the crowd that comes to a realization of their own sinfulness. Taking a central place is encounter with Jesus who calls us to repentance and offers us divine mercy. We are quick to condemn each

other; Jesus assures us, "Neither do I condemn you." We need only acknowledge our sinfulness and turn toward God. This is repentance. It rests in divine encounter and results in truth: our sinfulness, God's mercy, the promise of new life.

Living the Paschal Mystery

The gospel reminds us that we encounter Jesus at our own risk: we will be confronted with the truth of our own sinfulness. But encounter with Jesus also brings hope: in the confrontation and invitation to repent Jesus offers new life (see first reading).

We begin the last third of the Lenten season. Even if we haven't been all that faithful to our chosen Lenten practices, it isn't too late now to resolve to open ourselves to an encounter with Jesus so that we can approach Easter with a renewed spirit seeking new life. Like the crowd in the gospel, we often find it easier to focus on the sins of others than on our own weaknesses. Also like the crowd in the gospel, we can encounter Jesus and face the truth of ourselves. Lent is a time to encounter Jesus, turn from our sinfulness in repentance, and seek divine mercy. The remarkable good news of this gospel is that by facing and repenting of our own sinfulness we establish new relations with those around us. Acknowledgment of our own sins and how we have hurt others builds us into stronger members of Christ's Body.

Old and New Testament links

First Reading — Isaiah 43:16-21

¹⁶ Thus says the LORD, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, ¹⁷ who brings forth chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick:¹⁸ "Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. ¹⁹ Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. ²⁰ The wild beasts will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches; for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, ²¹ the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise.