

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent- C 2010

[Isaiah 43:16-21, Psalm 126:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 6, Philippians 3:8-14, John 8:1-11](#)

*Homilies are vehicles for breaking open the Word of God. First read the Sunday readings at <http://www.usccb.org/nab/032110c.shtml>*

Isaiah promises rivers and water to drink for us who find ourselves in the wasteland and the desert. Paul, in athletic terms, strains forward, continuing towards that goal, that prize which is God's calling in Jesus, a call by which everything else is considered a loss. It is interesting that the Greek word used for "loss" in this verse is translated as "excrement" elsewhere. This certainly gives us a more earthy interpretation of what "all else" is when compared to the prize offered through Jesus.

And then following these promises of fulfillment and relationship we have the story of the woman caught in adultery. It's funny that we still give that title to this story. That's probably the title that the scribes and Pharisees would give this story. Could I guess that Jesus' title would be something like, "Judge not, lest ye be judged" (Mt 7: 1).

It is clear, at the start, that this story is only incidentally concerned with the woman's offense. It is more generally concerned with the hearts of the scribes, Pharisees and all the people. As an aside, where is the other half of the adultery? Where's the guy in this? In any case, the woman only exists for the scribes and Pharisees as a pawn, as an instrument for them to get at Jesus.

They pose a question to Jesus that would condemn him no matter which way he answered. If he answered in support of the Mosaic punishment of stoning, Jesus would have gotten in trouble with the Roman authorities. You see, the Romans had suspended the power of capital punishment by the Sanhedrin, the local Jewish government. (Remember they needed Pilate to execute Jesus?) And if Jesus ruled against the Mosaic punishment, then how could Jesus be the prophet that everyone was claiming him to be?

Jesus retorted with that famous statement that has found its way into our daily expressions: "Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone..." He was at least talking about their sin of dehumanizing this woman as being only an object, an instrument for their devious plans to subvert Jesus. They could have cared less what was to happen with the woman. Jesus may have also caused them to reflect on their previous transgressions. In any case, by the time he got up a second time from writing on the ground, the accusers were all gone. They could not bear their own image as reflected by Jesus.

It is now that this woman, who had been only incidental before, becomes the center of the story. Moments after her horrible offense, she comes face to face with the one through whom all things were made. And in his face, she found no condemnation,

only a command to abandon all that stood in her way of Jesus' invitation to "go" embrace a new life, a life where all thirst is quenched, a prize by which all else would be considered loss.

This is an inspiring story. And yet if we just ascribe a moral to an incident that happened 2000 years ago, we would be forgetting that we believe God to be speaking to us today through Scripture. Maybe you are one of the scribes or Pharisees. Maybe you are the one caught. Maybe you are the one who is called to step up and be Jesus, to protect the vulnerable who is threatened. In any case, God is speaking to you with a very personal message.

How can we hear it? Well, I'm looking for the answer where Jesus wrote on the ground with his finger. It is impossible to know what he wrote then. Maybe we can find out what he is writing on the ground for you today.

Scholars and believers have been guessing about what he wrote for these past 20 centuries. A popular guess is that he was writing the sins of the scribes and Pharisees and once they saw they were "outed" they "got out of Dodge".

John Shea\* wrote that almost everyone at one time or another has given in to curiosity and asked, "What did he write?" Shea said it was not important what Jesus wrote and then continued giving some very insightful reflections on the story. I take exception to Shea's claim. If "everyone" is curious, then it is important. As the living Word, the Word of God doesn't take on life when it is expounded into open air. It becomes living when it is heard by a living person...you. It is in these wonderful moments of wonder and of imagination that you can open yourself to God's message for you today. His finger is writing on the ground something for you now. It may be something you have been obtuse about. You were too busy to see it. Too proud to hear it. Too obstinate to let it touch your heart. Allow yourself the imagination to wonder what that message might be. If an idea pops into your head that you think is silly, then dismiss it. If an idea forms that might be close, follow it. Be brave. Ask God for the grace of courage so that you can gaze on that which was too hard for the scribes and Pharisees to bear. Don't let their fear discourage you. You see, you have Jesus, where they did not.

This could be an all morning gaze at your personal Jesus scrawled message. I'll allow you some quiet time, around 30 seconds to start your gaze. Revisit that gaze sometime today or this week. If your message starts to look intimidating, look up and see Jesus patiently smiling at you.

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In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

\*The Relentless Widow, p 91, John Shea, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN