

Read

Isaiah 43:16-21

Psalm 126:1-2, 2-3,
4-5, 6

Philippians 3:8-14

John 8:1-11

LIVING THE WORD

Fifth Sunday of Lent

April 7, 2019



REFLECTION

What did Jesus write in the sand? Twice we see Jesus bend over to write in the sand as the scribes and Pharisees challenge him to determine an adulterer's fate. He throws the question back at those whose righteousness envelops them. No one can respond as they walk away heads hanging. Everyone leaves until only the accused woman is left. Jesus then offers his forgiveness and encourages her not to sin again. Who do you most identify with in the Gospel today? The woman who sins? Those casting judgement and shame? Or do you identify with Jesus' pause and creative outlet before responding? Either way, as followers of Christ, we will continue on our journey sure to follow in one of these three categories at any point given our ability to cope with life's events.

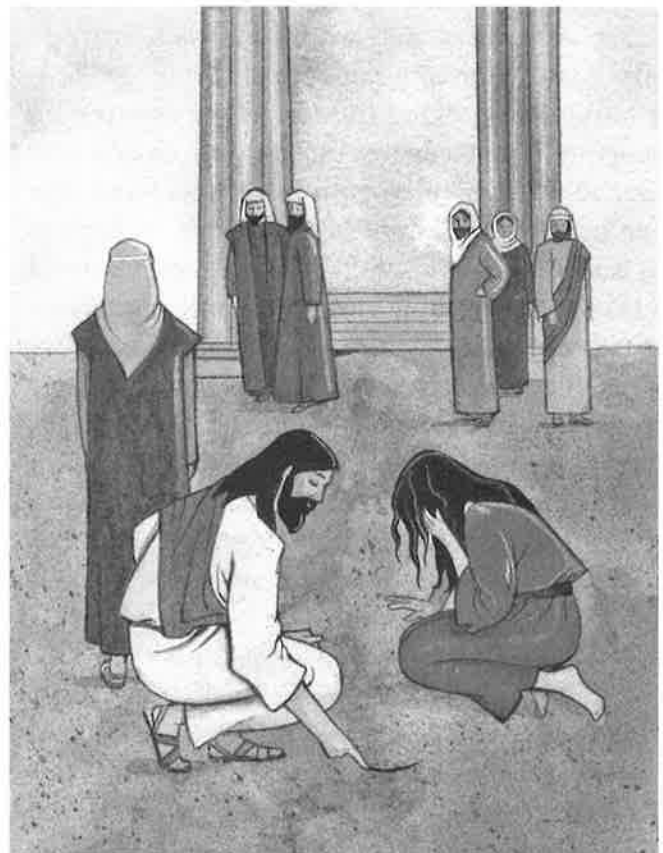
? QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today's readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ What prayer might Jesus write in the sand for you?
- ❖ What prayers are burning on your heart?



ACTION

A meditative ritual that some people use involves sand. Often experienced as a part of a reconciliation service, participants draw or write their sins into the sand. The sand is then wiped clean in a ritual focused on letting go of burdens or sins. Make yourself a meditative sand box to use this week. Find a plate or tray to pour the sand in. Spend time reading this Gospel and imagine what Jesus writes in the sand. Take time to reflect on your own faith journey this Lent by writing your prayers into the sand.





April 7, 2019

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

LECTIONARY #36C

Isaiah 43:16-21

Psalm 126:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 6

Philippians 3:8-14

John 8:1-11

Prepare for the Word

The following elements may be used by the catechist, teacher, or youth minister to prepare to facilitate today's session with teens. You may integrate this information into the reflection and discussion on today's readings.

Leader's Context

This Sunday draws attention to the loving mercy Christ shows the sinful woman, mercy that overshadows the righteous punishment the angry mob wanted to impose on her. In the eyes of the Lord, we are all sinners, and we should each strive to unite ourselves to him rather than spend time condemning and judging others before working on ourselves. The Gospel presents Jesus as one who came to do something entirely different and new than had ever been done before. When he forgives the woman caught in adultery, and forces the crowd to think instead about their own faults and flaws, Jesus presents mercy as the focus of his ministry and mission. Today we should focus on recognizing our own sinfulness before pointing it out in others, and seeking communion with God through mercy towards others. The people in today's Gospel were not quick to forgive the woman caught in adultery. It's only when Jesus forces them to look at their own failings that they are able to recognize that they too were to be stoned to death if their sins were to be put on display. This is how forgiveness takes root in the heart, and how Jesus is able to encourage the people to forgive this woman. Then he also encourages her to inwardly convert and experience his abundant love and mercy by going and sinning no more.

Q FOCUS: *To experience the abundant love and mercy of God.*

Liturgical Calendar Connection

Next Sunday begins Holy Week, which leads immediately to the three holiest days of the year (Sacred Paschal Triduum). In these final days of this season of repentance, fasting, prayer, and almsgiving, it's quite unique that mercy is yet again highlighted in the readings, this time from a new perspective. It's as if this last full week is meant to be pointedly focused on how continued growth comes when concentration is inward rather than outward—when we seek mercy for ourselves rather than pass judgment on others.

Church Teaching Connection

“Certainly forgiveness does not come spontaneously or naturally to people. Forgiving from the heart can sometimes be actually heroic. . . . The liberating encounter with forgiveness, though fraught with difficulties, can be experienced even by a wounded heart, thanks to the healing power of love, which has its first source in God who is Love” (St. John Paul II, World Day for Peace 1997, 4).

Hear the Word

Use this resource, a Lectionary, or a Bible to proclaim the reading. The book should be held reverently or placed on a lectern. If possible, light a candle that is placed near where the Gospel will be proclaimed. Gesture for teens to stand.

Gospel Acclamation

Use the same musical setting that is used in your parish or at school Masses. Teens may help with music and proclaim the Gospel.

Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ, king of endless glory.

Gospel

John 8:1-11

Reader: A reading from the holy Gospel according to John.

All: Glory to you, O Lord.

All make the Sign of the Cross on their forehead, lips, and heart.

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. But early in the morning he arrived again in the temple area, and all the people started coming to him, and he sat down and taught them. Then the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery and made her stand in the middle. They said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?" They said this to test him, so that they could have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and began to write on the ground with his finger. But when they continued asking him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." Again he bent down and wrote on the ground. And in response, they went away one by one, beginning with the elders. So he was left alone with the woman before him. Then Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She replied, "No one, sir." Then Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin any more."

Reader: The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Everyone may be seated.

Reflect on the Word

When beginning the reflection and discussion about today's readings, first refer to the handout for today. Ask teens what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask teens about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:

► Isn't it easy to point out the faults and flaws of other people? Without naming the person specifically, identify a time when you've seen the sinfulness and faults of someone else? What did you do? How did it make you feel to know that what they had done was sinful and wrong? Why is it so easy to look at another person and see everything they've done wrong? Why is it even harder to see our own wrongs and sinfulness?

This is precisely what happens in today's Gospel. An angry mob of scribes and Pharisees rush to Jesus with a woman "caught in the very act of committing adultery" (John 8:4). What could be worse! She has been caught in the act, and according to the law, she should be stoned to death. Put yourself in Jesus' shoes and imagine this angry mob has come to you.

► How would you respond to this situation (be honest with yourself)?

If Jesus says she should not be punished for her sin and lets her leave, then he is violating the Law of Moses. This would be blasphemous and cause him to face punishment himself. If he condemns her to death, he will be seen as cruel and could lose favor with many of the people who had begun to follow him and listen to his teachings.

► Jesus is caught between a rock and a hard place . . . so think about it: What would you do?

As only Jesus could, he does something new. The Lord will not only remember the events and the things of long ago; the Lord will do something new, unseen before, and completely different than what had ever been done in cases such as these.

► What is Jesus' response to the angry mob? What does he propose they do? Why is this such a radical response to the situation? Why does it shock the angry mob and make them leave? Do you think you would have thought to do/say this?

Jesus turns the situation entirely on its head and he makes a way in the desert of sin and brings forth a river in the wasteland of this woman's sin. Jesus says, "Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her" (John 8:7). He entirely changes the situation, turning it from "she is terrible and a dirty sinner" to "look at your own life, and be aware of your own struggles and faults." The angry mob tries to trap Jesus. Instead, he is able to force them to think about their own sinfulness.

► Why does Jesus handle the situation this way? Is it a successful approach? Would you want to be treated the same way if you were being condemned for your sins? What does he tell the woman to go and do?

Don't misunderstand what Jesus does here. He is not ignoring the sinfulness of this woman caught in adultery. He is not allowing others to judge her; he is reserving that role for himself. And when he does approach her and passes judgment on her, Jesus calls the woman to repentance.

"Go, and from now do not sin any more" (John 8:11) is exactly what Jesus tells us when we meet him in the confessional. We too are treated with the hands of mercy, which encourages us to change our ways, repent from our sinfulness, and change our lives to better reflect the mercy we've been given. In these final two weeks of Lent, it's important that we spend time reflecting on our own faults and failings and ask God for the strength to do as Jesus commands and not repeat these actions. We must also remember that we are not called to condemn others purely because we know how they have sinned, but instead to focus on our own growth and repentance.

Wrapping It Up

Consider these points to conclude the discussion and reflection. Integrate the thoughts and ideas that surfaced during the discussion as well as the "Church Teaching Connection" on page 170.

It's easy to judge another. It's far harder to honestly judge yourself. Today's Gospel gives the perfect example of what happens when we look to condemn rather than understand and forgive.

Jesus calls for honest acknowledgement of one's own faults and he challenges the mob not to judge another without first considering yourself. But Jesus also calls the woman caught in adultery to convert. He does not want her to continue sinning, but instead wants her to live a life of faith. He calls her to inward conversion and repentance.

We are sometimes the angry mob, condemning others and judging them. Sometimes we are the woman caught in adultery, having sinned and feeling shameful and sorrowful. At all times, we should strive to be like Christ, acknowledging the need for conversion and striving to live without sin in as many ways as we can.

Act on the Word

You will need two or three bibles for each group of five or six.

Have the teens form groups of five or six. Give each group a few Bibles (maybe two or three, depending on the number of people in their group). Tell them they have five minutes to find as many stories of forgiveness in Scripture (Old or New Testament) as they can. The story must include someone who has been caught in wrongdoing and is then forgiven for what they've done. When the time is up, have the group pick one of those stories and come up with a way to act out the story using only miming (no words). The other groups must then guess what story it could be. After every group is done, lead a discussion on how forgiveness and repentance is seen in each story and how they connect with the Gospel of today, which focuses on those primary themes.

Closing Prayer

*God our Father,
you show us your merciful love
through the life, passion, death, and Resurrection
of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.
May we always turn to you,
seeking forgiveness;
may we offer forgiveness in return,
to those who have wronged us.
May the mercy we receive
prompt us to sin no more.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.*

For Next Sunday

To help teens prepare for next Sunday's Mass, print, email, or share on a blog or social media the handout found on the next page. The JPG and PDF files are available at www.ltp.org/lwgr. Encourage teens to attend Palm Sunday Mass with family or friends. Give teens the Holy Week schedule and encourage them to attend the Triduum liturgies.