

Fifth Sunday of Lent

On Tuesday the year 2 students from the College came to the church armed with a long list of questions that they wanted me to answer. They were friendly questions, but I had to reflect well on many of them to give an appropriate answer. Jesus was asked many questions during his ministry but not all of them were friendly. The Jewish leaders often asked questions that were designed to trip him up.

Today we hear how Jewish leaders brought before him a woman who had been caught committing adultery.

“Moses has ordered us in the law to condemn women like this to death by stoning. What have you got to say?” What could Jesus say? If he had said that she deserves to die he would have been undermining so much of what he had revealed about God’s merciful love. If he had said that she was not guilty he would have been undermining the Mosaic Law.

But Jesus knew that they were not really interested in what happened to this woman. They just using her to try to get at Jesus. They wanted to catch Jesus out by the response that they were forcing him to make. Jesus said nothing, but he bent down and starting writing in the dust. We don’t know what he wrote. He may have been just doodling. But it was his gesture that was important. If he was going to make a judgment it was not to be from

above, but from below. When Jesus took on our humanity, he became someone who shared our weaknesses. Although he was sinless, he took on our sinfulness. He is in the dust with us so that he can raise us up with him and draw us into communion with God. It was from there that he could say, “If there is one of you who has not sinned, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.” He forces each person there to judge himself.

When we put ourselves among the crowd, we know that we would not have been able to throw any stones. All of us have sinned. In the gospel the woman’s accusers went away one by one, beginning with the eldest. As we get older and a little wiser, most of us try to be more honest too. Our sinfulness is perhaps more obvious to us now, than it was when we were younger. We too would need to go away.

When we put ourselves in the place of the condemned woman, we now find ourselves alone with Jesus. Those who had condemned us have gone away. We can look at Jesus as she saw him now looking at her with love and understanding. We can hear that word of forgiveness from Jesus as she did. “Neither do I condemn you. Go away and don’t sin anymore.” Jesus was not condoning her sin or denying her sinfulness. Jesus was forgiving her. Jesus had not come into our world to condemn us

but to save us. Jesus had come to show us the depth of our God's love for us. It was this love that set free the woman caught in adultery. It was this love that gave her the confidence to go and begin her life anew.

This is what Jesus hopes for us too. He wants us to be certain that we are so loved that when we become aware of our sinfulness, we too have the confidence to begin again. We are called by Jesus to accept the forgiveness and strength that will allow us to make a fresh start.

We are now only two weeks away from Easter. We have been making our journey through Lent to prepare us to be able to celebrate Easter well. In many communities catechumens have been preparing for their baptism. Others are preparing to celebrate Confirmation and receive Holy Communion for the first time as part of our community. David, Dianne and Chris with us at the Easter Vigil. All of us will be invited to renew our Baptism commitment this Easter. We will renew our Baptismal promises to avoid evil and to believe in God. We will be sprinkled with the Baptismal water as a sign that we want to claim again the life of Jesus that was first shared with us at our Baptism.

Another way of renewing our Baptism is through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Many of us take the opportunity in these weeks before Easter to celebrate this

Sacrament. We have an opportunity this Thursday evening to celebrate the sacrament together with other sinners like us. Like the woman in today's gospel, we realize that when we are alone in the presence of Jesus nobody condemns us. Jesus is there with us to reflect upon how we may have failed to live up to the ideals that we are trying to live by. But he does not condemn us. He is there for us to offer us the forgiveness and strength that we need to continue along the way of discipleship.

St. Paul spoke about these things in today's second reading. "I am no longer trying for perfection by my own efforts, but I want only the perfection that comes through faith in Christ and is from God, and based on faith. I am still running trying to capture the prize for which Christ Jesus captured me."

May we keep discovering the richness of that prize that Jesus won for us. May we discover something more of the depth of God's forgiving love and his mercy for each of us.