

Commentary to the 5th Sunday of Lent -C-

Come All You Sinners



What was going through her mind? She was being dragged to the Lord. She had to have been terrified. Certainly these men were going to kill her. The woman was caught in adultery. Women have been killed for far less. Even in our modern times, women are treated throughout the world as chattel, their lives completely dependent on the will of their fathers, brothers or husbands. Horrible things continue to happen to women in the name of religion.

Another travesty was about to take place, when the woman was brought before the Lord. She certainly expected to die. She must have been panic struck as they threw her before the Lord.

She also must have been ashamed. People were laughing at her. They treated her like dirt. Perhaps she herself thought she was dirt. If they didn't kill her, what type of life would she have left. Who would marry her? Who would give her a place to stay? Who would have mercy on her? She might as well die.

The better-than-thous of her society, shouted that she had to die. The Law of Moses demanded it. What would this Jesus say about that? They were certain that they had him. His hands were tied. This, the Kindest Man to ever live, would have to oppose the Law or agree that she should die.

And through the clamor, she looked up, and saw the Lord looking at her. Compassion for her flowed through him. Nobody cared about her before. The man or men who used her sexually, didn't care that she was going to die. The leaders of her people didn't care about her. Her own family probably disowned her. But Jesus cared.

Then there was the silence. He knelt down and began writing on the ground. Silence. The silence must have been overpowering. Finally, he spoke. "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone." And the sheer dynamism of his voice, the kindness and compassion of his voice, forced her accusers to return to the holes from which they had climbed out.

"There is no one to accuse you. Then, nor shall I. But go and sin no more."

She left, not just with her life, but with a new dignity. She had been forgiven. She now could embrace a new life.

Tradition holds that the woman was Mary Magdalene. Tradition also holds that Mary Magdalene became a close follower of the Lord and that this was the Mary who was the first to experience the Resurrection.

She was also the first, in a long line of sinners, to come before the Lord in guilt and in shame, feeling the weight of sin, knowing that punishment was deserved, yet hoping to receive a share in His compassion.

And so often in our lives we have come, groveling before the Lord, burdened with our sins, full of guilt, full of shame, seeking a glimmer of mercy. "Treat me as your servant, but let me back on the farm," we join the Prodigal Son in our plea to the Forgiving Father. But the graciousness of the Lord,

his forgiveness, his healing is beyond our fondest hopes. We are restored by his love.

There are many who will approach the Sacrament of Penance during these remaining days of Lent. Some come to Church regularly, lead good Christian lives, but recognize that they are full of little sins, venial sins, that are holding them back. Others have been away from the Lord for a long time. Full of guilt, full of shame, they seek restoration. They seek redemption. All are welcomed back. All receive the compassion of the Lord. All are told, "Neither do I condemn you. Go now and sin no more."

We pray today for the conversion of sinners, beginning with ourselves. The time is right for the harvest. This is the time of year, the last weeks of Lent, when many people will be reconsidering their lives, thinking that they can be better, infinitely better than they have been. Pray for the conversion of sinners, starting with ourselves, and extending our prayers to all who are full of guilt, full of shame, afraid to change, and wondering if there is any hope of forgiveness for them.

All you sinners

And the weak at heart

All you helpless

On the boulevards

Wherever you are now

Whatever evil you've found

Bring all of your troubles

And come lay 'em down

Need to Breathe's Come Lay 'em down (CCLI License # 2368115)

We call for the Lord's compassion today on all who so desperately seek to be forgiven, including ourselves. United to Mary Magdalene we pray:

Give us all the courage, Lord, to come before you in humility, and to leave not just with forgiveness, but with the determination to sin no more.

The parable of the Prodigal Son, Forgiving Father or Elder Brother, whatever, is calling us to reflect on the depth of our own commitment to the Lord, and our own determination to live His Love.

Fr. Joseph Pellegrino, SJ