

Reflection for the 5th Sunday of Lent

On the 5th Sunday of Lent our Gospel reading is taken from the Gospel of John 8:1-11, in this reading we hear about the Scribes and Pharisees bringing a woman to Jesus who is caught in the act of committing adultery. They point out to Jesus that according to the Law of Moses that they must stone her to death, they then ask Him what He thinks about this situation. This Gospel reading can challenge us in so many ways and can cause us to have more questions than answers. I will have to admit every time I hear or read this Gospel, I tend to wonder about the other person that was a part of committing adultery and why it is only the woman that is brought forward. In this Gospel reading we never hear of anyone speaking of the other person that is involved. The Scribes and Pharisees only focus on the woman, in fact Jesus only focuses on the woman and the woman never mentions the other person that is a part of this crime. We can of course use the explanation that in the time and culture that Jesus lived in it was the woman that was brought forward for the crime of adultery and not the man. This is not what the Mosaic Law states, the Law states that the stoning for adultery is only prescribed when the woman is a betrothed virgin, and the man is to be stoned as well, the law also requires that a witnesses to the adultery be produced and the witness is the one to cast the first stone. It is also important to note that in the time of Jesus the Roman Government did not permit the Jews to execute their own criminals.

What we see with the Scribes and Pharisees is that in bringing the woman caught in adultery before Jesus they are trying to trap Him. If Jesus told them to stone her according to the Law of Moses, He would be reported to the Roman Government for violating the Roman Law. If He told the Scribes and Pharisees to let her go free, He would be violating the Law of Moses. It clearly looks like the Scribes and Pharisees had created the perfect trap for Jesus. No matter what He said He would be breaking the law, be it the Roman Law or the Mosaic Law, He was truly trapped. Jesus' takes a different path by focusing on the woman that was brought before Him and responds with mercy; in doing so He provides a lesson of mercy for everyone who was present.

When the Scribes and Pharisees informed Jesus that the Law of Moses required the woman to be stoned to death, they asked Him to share His opinion. What Jesus did was to bend down and to begin to write on the ground with His finger. But the Scribes and Pharisees continue to push Him for an answer, and so in time Jesus straightened up and says to them, "Let the one among you who is without sin to be the first to throw a stone at her." It was this sentence that Jesus spoke after He had stopped writing on the ground that provided the woman with mercy and invited everyone present to look within their hearts and if not able to find mercy, then at least find no reason to object to mercy being present.

It is interesting to note that the Greek word for "*caught*" is "*katapou or katelephthe*," it is normally defined as, "*caught in the act of*." There is also another Greek word "*katapauis*," which is normally defined as, "*a resting place, putting to rest, or a heavenly blessedness where God dwells*." In our Gospel reading this Sunday we hear of Jesus Christ enabling the woman to go from "*katapou*" to "*katapauis*." The woman who stands before Jesus and waits for him to speak to her is given a new lease on life she goes from being caught to encountering a heavenly blessing where God dwells.

Last week our Gospel reading presented us with the parable of the *Prodigal Son*, this week we have the *Woman Caught in Adultery*, both Gospels present us with an opportunity for mercy. Last week we heard of the mercy that is offered by God through His forgiveness that is found in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, this week we are invited to find mercy in our hearts of others that are struggling and need a second chance. The 40 days of Lent can and should truly be a challenging time for us. This Season invites each one of us to take a journey of prayer, fast and abstinence that leads us to a time a self-discovery. This self-discovery with the grace of God and the support of the Church will lead each one of us to a better version of ourselves and to a closer relationship with our merciful God.