



WEEKLY GOSPEL REFLECTION



Fifth Sunday of Lent, Cycle C

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"Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." John 8:7

This is a well-known, powerful story with important implications for our understanding of morality, our understanding of God's covenant with his people and his unbounded forgiveness. The contrast between the reactions of the woman's accusers and the reaction of Jesus makes it clear that God is demonstrating his ancient covenantal promises in Jesus: *"I will be your God and you will be my people."*

For his journey Jesus arrives to the temple after praying at the Mount of Olives. Jesus is the bearer of the once exiled divine Glory due to Original Sin. The divine once resided in the Temple. But due to the offensive sins of the people, the divine glory departed. It "leapt" from the Temple to the Mount of Olives to the heavens. Now the divine glory in the person of Jesus returns. This arrival happened *"Early in the morning..."* (John 8:1), signifying a new day, both physically and spiritually. There is to be a new right-ordered relationship between God's desire to bring Glory and the sinfulness of humanity. Where sin had once driven away Glory, sin has for all time been overcome.

The scene intensifies when the woman caught in adultery has been brought and made to stand before the accusers. The accusers delight in finding people in sin and holding them there, staring the stare of the self-righteous. The scribes and Pharisees then try to take advantage of Jesus, trapping him in sin when they ask, *"Jesus, what do you say about the law Moses commanded of us to stone such women?"* But Jesus, the divine mystic-prophet, gives a response that echoes through the ages, *"Let the one without sin be the first to throw a stone at her."*

John depicts Jesus bending down not once but twice to write on the ground with his finger. He bent down, straightened up and bent down again. These actions are reflective of the book of Exodus where God twice writes the Ten Commandments in stone using his finger. Moses shatters the first set when he caught his people idolizing the golden calf. In Hebrew tradition, the breaking of the covenant between God and His Chosen People were considered adultery, because Yahweh was married to his people. But the story in Exodus does not end with the death of the idolaters-adulterers. Moses returns to the mountain of theophany to plead for his people. The Lord tells Moses to cut two more tablets. *"I will again write on the tablets the words that you broke."* So God writes a second time, as Jesus did. Between the first and second writing, the Glory of God is revealed, mercy in judgment, in both accounts.

Jesus writes with his finger as a sign of divine authorship. He writes twice as a sign of God's forgiveness. God's Covenant binds him to his people, regardless of their sinful actions. Then, *"When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders."*

In John's Gospel the Mother of Jesus is called "Woman" twice, at the Wedding at Cana, and at the cross. Jesus addresses this "Woman" with this title of honor, pointing to the deep life-giving power of all women. In his gentle way, Jesus looks up asks, *"Woman, Has no one condemned you?"* St. Augustine commented in his homily about this, *"Only two are left, mercy and misery."*

The woman calls Jesus "Lord" because she now knows he is the divine one. His refusal to condemn is the action of a merciful God. All of God's judgments lead to hope in the new day. Sin will never again drive Divine Glory back into the heavens. It is written twice upon the earth, and a new temple has been built - *"Destroy this temple and in three days I will build it again!"* (John 2:19)

As you reflect on this story, consider the mercy of Jesus in your life. When he speaks to the Woman, he speaks also to you. Though we are told to sin no more, Jesus is gentle and forgiving. Mercy ever prevails, through the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

A reading from the gospel according to John.

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.
Early in the morning he came again to the temple.
All the people came to him
and he sat down and began to teach them.

The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman
who had been caught in adultery;
and making her stand before the people,
they said to Jesus,
*"Teacher, this woman was caught
in the very act of committing adultery.
In the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?"*
They said this to test Jesus,
so that they might have some charge to bring against him.

Jesus bent down
and wrote with his finger on the ground.
When the scribes and Pharisees kept on questioning him,
Jesus straightened up and said to them,

*"Let anyone among you who is without sin
be the first to throw a stone at her."*

And once again Jesus bent down and wrote on the ground.

When the scribes and Pharisees heard what Jesus had said,
they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders;
and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him.

Jesus straightened up and said to her,

*"Woman, where are they?
Has no one condemned you?"*

She said, *"No one, sir."*

And Jesus said,
*"Neither do I condemn you.
Go your way, and from now on do not sin again."*

The Gospel of the Lord