

## Fifth Sunday of Lent

March 25, 2007

*Isaiah 43:16-21; Philippians 3:8-14; John 8:1-11*

Homilist: *S. Cecilia Canales*

When the woman was dragged before Jesus, I wonder what was going through her mind. “I am going to get killed. Who is this and why are they bringing me to him? Why humiliate me further? Where is the man I was with? Why isn’t he being punished?”

I wonder how Jesus looked at her. Did his compassionate heart show on his face? Was she too frightened to notice? Did she know who he was and how he would treat her? He did not speak immediately, but rather started writing on the ground. Some scripture scholars conjecture that he wrote the names of people’s sins in the dirt; other homilists conjecture that he was stalling for time, letting people cool down, giving himself time to calm down, angry that they would bring this frightened woman to him. Whatever his reason, whatever he wrote, everyone waited for him to speak. Would he prove himself righteous and support the law or easy on sin by supporting the woman? He did neither and both! He reminded everyone that they are sinners in need of God’s mercy. He did not condemn the woman, but neither did he excuse her. He invites her to a change of heart, *loves* her into a change of heart by accepting her in her sinfulness!

It is so easy to judge others when we are not in their shoes. How often I have done that! We all have groups of people that we find difficult to condone, whatever categories we may chose. It could be based on race, color, gender or creed, immigration status, criminal activity, sexual orientation, intelligence, politics, etc. The list is endless! I struggle with people I consider arrogant or self-righteous. *I* become self-righteous when dealing with them! “Who do they think they are?” the whole time judging them, condemning them for judging others. This may seem nonsensical, but I know I do it. Don’t you? Who is on your list?

Of course, there are times when our responsibility forces us to make judgments or punish others—just consequences for dangerous or immoral behaviors. Parents and teachers do this in disciplining their children, employers and judges when dealing with adults who are harming themselves or the common good.

However, Jesus shows us another way of dealing with people in general. When life’s circumstances and choices made, cause people to do questionable things, Jesus invites us to be merciful; not to condemn them, but rather to invite them to a new way of being. Notice that in the case of the woman in the Gospel, she was guilty of the charge brought against her, no doubt about it. She “deserved” punishment. The point is that none of us has the right to condemn another. Only God can do that, and Jesus is telling us that God chooses not to! Rather, God looks into the heart and sees the goodness of the person, the child God created, and cannot help but respond with mercy and compassion. God accepts us in our sinfulness, simple as that. Jesus restores her God-given dignity, treats her as a person rather than an object. This is what God does and what Jesus invites us to do as his followers.

We have a clean slate with Jesus. Isaiah reminds us that God says, “Remember not the events of the past,...see, I am doing something new!” Sorry for my sins, my mistakes, how do I want to live today? God has done great things for me; how do I wish to respond? By treating myself and others as he does. Every time I give myself or another a second chance or try to look at life with a new lens, I am following Jesus. None of us is perfect at doing this, nor have any of us reached the goal of union with Christ, but St. Paul says “I continue my pursuit in hope,” knowing that Christ’s love draws us to himself. I am forgiven, as was the woman in the Gospel. “I have indeed been taken possession of by Christ Jesus.” Perhaps not totally—I still resist in ways, but I belong to Christ! That is the good news!