

Fifth Sunday of Lent

March 21, 2010

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Good Morning. Today you need to get in touch with the woman who was caught in adultery. And you need to experience what she experienced. She thought in a moment she was going to be killed. She thought in a moment that this prophet who had come to preach God's word would be the last nail in her coffin. Now remember that she was caught in the very act of adultery. That means she was being intimate with a man. She was probably naked. They dragged her through the streets and brought her before God. As we talked about last week, as she is brought before God, God Himself who made the law, God Himself who made the command that anyone caught in adultery must be killed. That was His command. It wasn't a suggestion.

And now they bring her before this same God and said, "It is taught by Moses that we are to condemn her to death by stoning. What do You have to say?" And notice He doesn't go away from the law. He doesn't say, "Well what she does is okay." All He does is He starts writing on the ground, and we really have no idea what He wrote. Some people say He just wrote the Ten Commandments. We don't know. But, whatever it is, after He got up and wrote these things, it was for the people to see, He got up and said, "You who are without sin, cast the first stone." Because it is all of us, all of us have sinned. It is unbelievable to me how I do it, how you do it, how we all do it. How we are the people in the crowd so often who say, "Yeah, let's get them." Come on. I am just so sick of my own hypocrisy, and so sick of the Church's hypocrisy, so sick of everyone's hypocrisy. We are all like this. We all condemn each other and yet we are all in the same boat. There isn't one of us here, no one, who doesn't deserve a lot, a punishment from God. There is not one of us here, not one, who could pick up that stone and start throwing it at that woman and kill her. Not one of us here. So Jesus meets her where she is at. He loves her where she is at and then He tells her don't sin anymore. That is the same for us. That is what we must do. Christ meets us where we are at.

Did you listen to the second reading? It is one of the most powerful readings because here is Paul acknowledging the only thing that matters. You know this woman didn't deserve salvation. Tradition has it that she was Mary Magdalene, we don't know, and that she became a great saint. That is there to remind us that as I have said before and it is a very old adage, every saint has a past. Every saint has a sinful past, except for the Blessed Mother. The only one who gets away from that one. The rest of us have sinful pasts. And every sinner has a future, that's us. We all have a future. When Paul can say, "I consider all else as rubbish except knowing Jesus." That is what it is coming down for all of us. Paul knew what it was to be set free from sin. What happened is when he was embraced by Christ, and that is what it says, "Not that I have embraced Him, He embraced me." When you and I allow ourselves to be embraced by Christ this is the true knowing, right? Remember in the Old Testament the whole image for knowing somebody? You know Mary did not know man before Christ was born. Do you all know what that means? It is the same word used now by Paul knowing Christ, that intimacy, that intimacy of being consumed by another, of becoming one with another. And this is what Paul says, "that if I just get that, if I just get that, that this knowing Christ, everything else in my life it means nothing accept for knowing Jesus and to experience in my being the power of the resurrection in me if I must go through the sufferings that I need to go through." That is what we go through at Lent. But notice the whole thing about Paul and this whole thing with this woman had nothing to do with the law itself or living in a just way. Everything with this woman today and with Paul came from their knowledge of Jesus Christ, their

encounter with Jesus, their experience with Jesus Christ. Then after that everything changes. So the question intimately we have to ask each of ourselves today is do I know that power of Jesus in my own life? Do I know that intimacy with Jesus Christ? Do I know that I have been possessed by Him? That I have been forgiven by Him? That I have been loved by Him? That is the only thing that matters. It is the only thing that I cling to. That is all that Paul would cling to. I don't care what else is going on. What else I have lost. I forget about what lies behind. As I talked about last week so many of us think that we are holy and we cry over these sins twenty years ago. For some of us that is pride thing. You know that. If I feel really bad then God is going to get me for what I did twenty years ago. Then we keep really focused on ourselves and our past. We just stay there. And Paul doesn't say that. Paul doesn't even give a thought to his past. His past is gone. This woman's past is gone. They encountered Christ and He said stop looking at yourself. Stop looking at your past. Look at Me! I am the one who is paying for your past. I'm the one who is giving you a new life. I'm the one who is going to set you free. So the courage that we need to have is to truly come before Jesus today. Acknowledge our sin. Acknowledge what I am without Him. Then cling to Him the way He clings to me. Let Christ transform us as He did this woman who became a saint today who was to be condemned to death. As He did Paul who went and killed many Christians and stood there righteously by as he judged everybody else. Both of them were transformed because they came to know Christ intimately.

So if you and I want to be transformed that means we have got to know Jesus Christ to have this experience of Him intimately. The only way that will happen of course as I have talked about a thousand times, I have talked about to eleven hundred men yesterday in Akron Ohio, is listen, prayer must become your life. It has just got to be. It is the only thing that is going to get you through everything. It's as if in prayer you are clinging to Jesus and you are not just saying your prayers, my gosh, say your prayers of course but then shut up. Let Him embrace you. "I have been embraced by Christ." says Paul. "I have been embraced by Him." Allow Him in your prayer to embrace you. Allow yourself in your prayer to keep focused on Him, not yourself, not your sins, because it is pride, fullness of pride. When you are focusing on yourself and your sins it is so easy to judge everybody else because you judge yourself all of the time. So if you find yourself a person who judges others it is very simple because you are always judging yourself. You think this God who is an ogre is just here to punish the world. Everybody is bad including you. That isn't the Christ we encounter today in the Gospel. That isn't the Christ we encounter today through the eyes and the words of St. Paul. When we cling to Jesus He transforms us, He forgives us and He lets us, as Paul says, share in His resurrection. But the key to sharing in the resurrection of Christ is dying to our self. And dying to our self is dying to our sins, yes. It is dying to our past, yes. It is dying to our own fake righteousness, yes. It is then clinging and being embraced by Jesus. When that happens, then you and I can become the saints that God wants us to be. You got it? Get it? Going to do it? May each of you know His live today and forever, amen.