

Lenten e-devotion for April 8, 2022

³⁻⁶ *The religion scholars and Pharisees led in a woman who had been caught in an act of adultery. They stood her in plain sight of everyone and said, "Teacher, this woman was caught red-handed in the act of adultery. Moses, in the Law, gives orders to stone such persons. What do you say?" They were trying to trap him into saying something incriminating so they could bring charges against him.*

⁶⁻⁸ *Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger in the dirt. They kept at him, badgering him. He straightened up and said, "The sinless one among you, go first: Throw the stone." Bending down again, he wrote some more in the dirt.*

⁹⁻¹⁰ *Hearing that, they walked away, one after another, beginning with the oldest. The woman was left alone. Jesus stood up and spoke to her. "Woman, where are they? Does no one condemn you?"*

¹¹ *"No one, Master."*

"Neither do I," said Jesus. "Go on your way. From now on, don't sin." John 8:3-11 (The Message)

The burning question I have is: what happened to the guy who was with this woman?? She was "caught in an act of adultery" so clearly she wasn't alone. What did the religion scholars and the Pharisees do to the other culprit? St. John didn't think it important to tell us but: "Inquiring minds want to know."

I feel badly for this woman. I imagine her standing there with some stranger's cloak hastily thrown over her. She's covered, but in some makeshift way, hair askew, terror evident, perhaps tears streaking her face. (I don't want to paint her as a victim – but I can't help but remember the "adultery" between David & Bathsheba. Somehow I doubt that Bathsheba would have had any true freedom to reject the King's advances.)

In any case, the man who was **also** caught in adultery missed out by not meeting Jesus. Not just because Jesus' words prevented corporal punishment, but because he missed the gift of pure forgiveness: *"Go on your way. From now on, don't sin."* Even later, in the early centuries of the Church, adultery was one of "the big three": those HUGE sins being adultery, murder and heresy (denouncing the faith, teaching untrue things), considered unforgivable after someone was baptized. Yet Jesus simply says, *"Go on your way. From now on, don't sin."* He doesn't say, "Death to all adulterers!" He doesn't say, "I'll let you live, but you have to eat worms the rest of your life." He says, *"Go on your way. From now on, don't sin."* In other words: "Live the rest of your life in true love."

I was discussing this story with Fr. Bill Lago from St. Denis and he offered wonderful insight. Jesus bends down to write in the dirt. The usual question is, "What did He write?" (Did He simply like to doodle? Or was He writing the sins of those who were on a hair trigger to stone the woman?) Fr. Bill suggested the real significance of Jesus' action is that He is communicating with the woman whose eyes are downcast in fear and shame. The Lord Jesus always "meets us where we're at." If we're setting our

eyes on a horizon of hope, He meets us there. If we're sinking in shame, He'll meet us there, too.

Let us pray.

Father in Heaven, we don't want to minimize the seriousness of sin, the hurt it causes, but we also don't want to minimize the power of Your forgiveness. You sent Your Son "so that all who believe in Him may not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16) May Your Holy Spirit convince us that sins confessed are sins forgiven. Your expectation is simply that we "go, and sin no more." Amen

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