

April 3, 2022
5th Sunday of Lent
John 8:1-11

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. But early in the morning he arrived again in the temple area, and all the people started coming to him, and he sat down and taught them. Then the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery and made her stand in the middle. They said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?" They said this to test him, so that they could have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and began to write on the ground with his finger. But when they continued asking him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her."

Again he bent down and wrote on the ground. And in response, they went away one by one, beginning with the elders. So he was left alone with the woman before him. Then Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She replied, "No one, sir." Then Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin anymore."

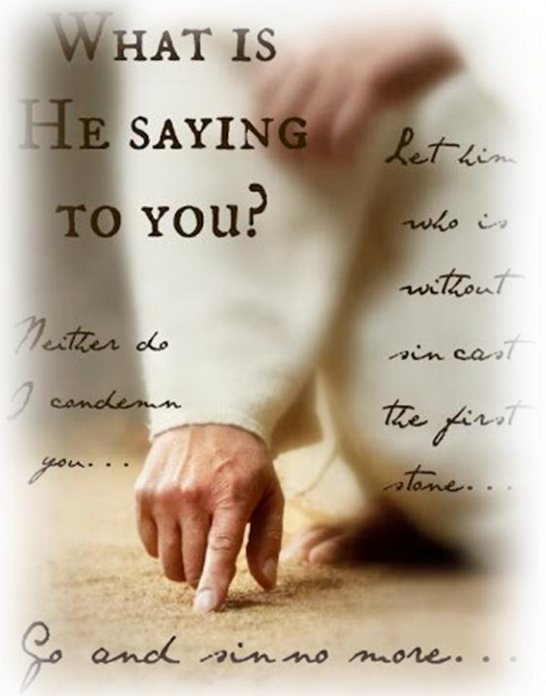
Background

While this text is taken from John's gospel, it reflects a common theme of Luke: Jesus' compassion for sinners. Early manuscripts of John's Gospel do not contain this text; scholars believe that it was added later.

This text presents the familiar story of a woman caught in adultery. Because the story is so familiar, the reader may not be attentive to the opening verses. The temple area was the gathering place for the scribes, Pharisees, and those who were concerned with matters of the law. While they are portrayed in the gospels as being opponents of Jesus, the gospels also state that Jesus ate with them--something one did only with those whom one respected. When Jesus goes into the outer area of the temple and sits down, he is acting like a scribe. They regularly would sit and offer their comments on the law to students who gathered about their favorite teacher.

Adultery was an offense against the honor of a husband. A husband could accuse his wife, but a wife could not accuse her husband. But according to the book of Deuteronomy, both the man and woman should be punished. "If a man is discovered having relations with a woman who is married to another, both the man and woman with whom he has had relations shall die. Thus shall you purge the evil from your midst." (Deuteronomy 22:22) But generally, the woman bore the blame and punishment. According to the Hebrew law, she could be stoned to death if she were a woman who was betrothed (age 12-14), and strangled if she were a married woman.

The law also prescribed that the witnesses of the offense should be the ones to begin the execution. However, according to Roman law, the Hebrew people did not have the authority to execute anyone. Those who brought this woman to Jesus had set a trap. The crowd would be alienated if Jesus spoke against a legitimate part of the Mosaic tradition. But if he supported the stoning of this woman, then he would contradict his previous teaching about forgiveness, and would place himself above the Roman law that reserved imposing a death sentence for itself.



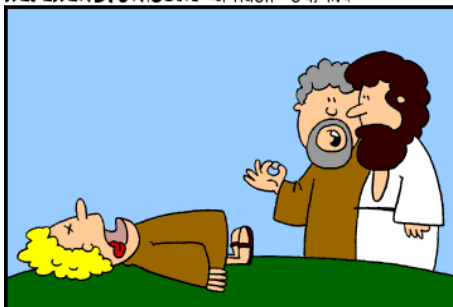
The woman herself is being treated as a pawn for a debate about the law. Those who have brought her into the temple area do not care about what happens to her, nor about her reputation. In contrast, Jesus seems to be more concerned with her than anything else. Other attempts to trap Jesus have left those setting the trap embarrassed and discredited. However, here he does not seem to be concerned with them either. Instead of responding to them, he remains silent and begins to doodle on the ground, a common practice for those pondering a situation. This places the burden of what to do with the woman on those who brought her forward. According to the law, the witnesses are responsible for being the first to carry out the execution. But they are unwilling to do so, and eventually they, and the crowd, abandon the woman. It is only then, when Jesus is alone with the woman, that he speaks with her. He neither condones what she has done nor treats her as a public sinner. "Then Jesus straightened up and said to her, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' She replied, 'No one, sir.' Then Jesus said, 'neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin anymore.'" (John 8:10-11)

Reflection Questions

1. Can you recall a time when you were caught "red handed" doing something you should not have been doing? What was the situation? What were some of the thoughts and feelings going through you at the time? How did the person who discovered you treat you?
2. Have you ever been made a public example of behavior that was not acceptable? (In the classroom, at church, in sports, or at work?)
3. What is your reaction to the fact that Jesus is in the temple sitting among the scribes?
4. Do you know people who seem to make "obeying the law," or "the rule," the measure of what is acceptable behavior?
5. How big of a part do "rules" and "laws" play in your personal life?
6. Do you have private sins that, if exposed, would embarrass you to the point that you would not want to be seen in public or in church?
7. What do you think was the experience of this woman when she was caught? What was her experience of being with Jesus that day?
8. What does this gospel say to you about the kind of church Jesus would like us to be?
9. Can you talk to God about this gospel and your own feelings about the day when you will come face to face with God?

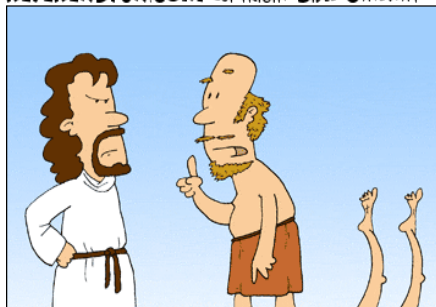
The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. <https://fssc-calledtobe.org/>

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(See John 8:1-11) 03-09-1998
 "HE WHO IS WITHOUT SIN CASTS THE FIRST STONE", RIGHT? WELL I STILL HAVE THE FIRST STONE ... I THREW THE SECOND STONE AT HIM

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(See John 8:1-11) 11-20-2006
 OH I AM NOT WITHOUT SIN ... MY TWO FAVORITE SINS, IN FACT, ARE LYING AND CASTING STONES AT PEOPLE

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(See John 8:1-11) 07-28-2005
 AFTER I SAID THAT I THOUGHT "WAIT A MINUTE ... I AM WITHOUT SIN"