

## **Fifth Sunday of Lent**

*April 6, 2025*

We are just one week away from the Holy Week and away from our celebration of God's love shown in the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus. For us Christians this season of Lent is a time of special grace in which we experience the presence of a personal God who cares and loves us.

Our response is to transform ourselves and live according to his will. We want to do something new and come to him in obedience and freedom. Before him, we acknowledge our weakness and we know that he is the one who supports us and builds with us a new relationship. We ought to change our lives during this season of Lent and come closer to him.

Therefore the Church calls this season a joyful time because it is our preparation for the future joy of Easter that approaches us bringing us his blessings, mercy, and forgiveness. As we approach the end of our Lenten season, we are reminded of our last opportunity to cooperate with God's graces and his benevolent love. It is his invitation to us to enter deep into his mystery and look for his unlimited love.

I believe there's a lot that we don't know in the Gospel story we just heard. That probably seems like a strange thing for me to say given that this is one of the most well-known stories in Scripture. But what do we REALLY know? We know that Jesus intervened in a potentially violent situation, a life or death situation to be more exact. And we know that what was just about to happen DIDN'T happen. And we saw Jesus do that by engaging both one group of people and one individual and then they walked away.

The group of people, of course, were those who were about to stone the woman caught in adultery. They were prepared to carry out what the law demanded of them, prepared to do what they might have believed was the "right" thing to do.

In a very real sense, they probably considered the woman to be “bad” and considered themselves to be “good”. Put simply, the “righteous” were about to deal with the “unrighteous”, at least in their minds. Jesus, of course, intervenes and disrupts the whole situation. His words have a powerful effect on them, causing them to abandon the stoning altogether. And they walk away . . . .

Yet, we don’t know what happened after that. We know they left, but that’s all. Was it out of shame? Was it because they started wondering about things they hadn’t wondered about before? Was it because they had never experienced this sort of opposition before, and therefore weren’t exactly sure how to handle the situation? But what we really don’t know might be the most important thing of all. Did they leave as changed individuals?

No longer willing to pass judgment on others?

No longer willing to carry out cruel punishments?

No longer seeing themselves in only one way, as “good” in the eyes of God?

No longer willing to see the woman (and others similar to her) in only one way, as “bad” in the eyes of God?

In other words, did their encounter with Jesus truly CHANGE them?

And what about the woman? Before Jesus came on the scene she must have been terrified. Was this going to be the end of her? Was this it? I can’t imagine what that must have felt like. And then Jesus somehow changed the whole situation and brought about an entirely different outcome. What a relief for her, something she probably couldn’t have imagined just a few moments before. And then Jesus extends his forgiveness to her. Incredible. And she walks away a free person.

Yet, we really don’t know what happened after that. Did she reform her life, or not? Did she recognize that she had just been given a second chance, and that it would be incredibly unwise to squander it? Did she start seeing herself in a different light, and maybe even start seeing Jesus

in a different light? Did she realize that this was an encounter with the divine, and that God had a hand in it, that God was behind it? But the most important question is one we don't know the answer to, did she leave a changed individual?

Able to choose a path that respected the dignity in which she was created?

Able to resist the temptation to go back to her old ways?

Able to embrace a new way of living, a new way of being?

Able to recognize God's great love for her?

In other words, did her encounter with Jesus truly CHANGE her?

And so, there really is a lot about the story that we don't know, basically everything that came next. And it is much the same with each of us. We each know what has happened so far. We know the "plot" that has unfolded in our lives up to this point. But what now? What's the next chapter? Is it more of the same, or is there a different path the Lord is inviting us to walk down?

And it doesn't matter which of the two we see ourselves more as. Maybe you consider yourself more like the scribes and Pharisees in the story, a little too convinced of your own goodness, a little too convinced that others are the problem. Or maybe you consider yourself more like the woman, stuck in an unhealthy pattern of bad choices and sin, maybe even seeing yourself as unlovable, or of little value, or without hope for a better future. Or maybe you consider yourself to be something else altogether, someone not specifically depicted in the story. But in any case, the question is the same . . . .

What is next for each of us?

In a very real sense, Lent is meant to be a forty day encounter with Jesus, a holy time we set aside each year to let God once again break into our hearts and minds in a profound way. It's a time to look deep within and

get an accurate picture of what our story has been so far, get an accurate picture of what is taking place in our lives in this very moment.

And then, we are invited to imagine that Jesus has walked into the scene and now wants to speak to us, hoping to change our story, change what happens next, CHANGE US. Will we let him? Or will we simply walk away from this holy season of Lent exactly as we were before, as if the encounter with Jesus had never happened, as if Jesus hadn't broken into our individual stories at all?

Hmm . . . I guess we have something to think about.