

Sunday, 21 Mar 2010 - 5th Sunday of Lent

"Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again"

Reading 1: Is 43, 16-41

Reading 2: Phil 3:8-14

Responsorial Psalm : Ps 26: 1-2, 2 3 ,4-5, 6

Gospel : Jn 8:1-11

Gospel Reading: *John 8:1-11*

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Early in the morning he came again to the temple; all the people came to him, and he sat down and taught them. The Scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery and placing her in the midst they said to him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such. What do you say about her?" This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her." And once more he bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. But when they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the eldest, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus looked up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again."

Meditation:

This incident of the merciful forgiveness of an adulteress by the Son of God has many lessons for all of us in this season of Lent. We are all sinners in greater or lesser degree. We all offend the good God in many ways. But, thank God, we are not dealing with the Scribes and Pharisees as our judges, but with a God of mercy, a God who knows and understands our weaknesses and frailties. No matter how many and how serious our sins may have been, no matter how low we may have fallen, the mercy and forgiveness of God is ever there for the asking.

But ask we must and repent we must, for not even the omnipotent and all-merciful God can take away from us the sin we want to keep. Who could be so foolish as not to accept the divine offer of mercy? Who could ever let his personal pride and selfishness put his own eternal happiness in jeopardy? There are probably people in hell, but if there are, it is not because of their sins that they are there. It is rather because they were too proud and too selfish to repent of them and ask God for his forgiveness.

A second lesson for all of us in today's story is that we should try to imitate our divine Lord's mercy by being more merciful and more compassionate towards sinners. Too many of us are inclined to judge too harshly and heartlessly the neighbour whose sins happen to become public, whilst we minimize our own failings because they are secret. Remember our Lord's words to the Pharisees: "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to cast a stone at her." Spreading scandal may be, and often is, a more grievous sin than the fall of a neighbour which we tell about with gusto whilst pretending to be seriously disgusted with his moral failing. Whilst we must hate sin in ourselves and others we must learn from our Lord to love the sinner even while disapproving of the sin. This love will be proved in part by our silence regarding his sin

Questions for Community Faith Sharing:

In what ways have I judged, as the Scribes and the Pharisees did?

Have I also been guilty of participating in spreading scandal, untruth or rumors?

Do I recognize the love and mercy of God, my Father?

What must I do to come closer to Jesus?

"God our Father, we find it difficult to come to you, because our knowledge of you is imperfect. In our ignorance we have imagined you to be our enemy; we have wrongly thought that you take pleasure in punishing our sins; and we have foolishly conceived you to be a tyrant over human life. But since Jesus came among us, he has shown that you are loving, that you are on our side against all that stunts life, and that our resentment against you was groundless. So we come to you, asking you to forgive our past ignorance, and wanting to know more and more of you and your forgiving love, through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Prayer of Saint Augustine)