

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT
Year C: Is 43:16-21; Ps 126; Phil 3:8-14; Jn 8:1-11
April 3, 2022
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We can imagine the embarrassment of the woman caught in adultery. The Gospel doesn't tell us if she was repentant and determined to change her life, but even if she was not, she was most likely ashamed to be brought before so many men who were judging her. And she also must have been seized with fear. The penalty in the law for adultery was death by stoning, as the scribes and Pharisees were eager to carry out. She must have feared that her life was about to end by a very painful death.

The scribes and the Pharisees assumed that Jesus would not consent to her execution. The Gospel tells us that they brought the woman before Jesus and reminded Him of the prescribed penalty in the Mosaic law "*so that they could have some charge to bring against him.*" They assumed that He would not follow the law, and then they could accuse Him of not being faithful to the law of Moses.

But Jesus did not contradict the law. In fact, He invited the scribes and Pharisees to follow the law and administer the penalty. He said, "*Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.*" The only person in that scene who was without sin was Jesus, the sinless One. He was the one who was entitled to throw the first stone. But, of course, He was not eager to see the woman killed. He was eager instead to see her freed from a sinful life.

Jesus showed the woman caught in adultery all the respect and dignity that other men and the scribes and Pharisees refused to show her. Jesus was gentle with her and determined to help her, so that she could regain her dignity and self-worth. It must have been an intense moment when the scribes and Pharisees all dropped the stones they intended to throw and walked away, leaving Jesus alone with the woman. He 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 any more.*"

Jesus had just saved her from condemnation and had saved her life, and He wanted her to live a new life, with all the respect and dignity that she deserved. One of the things Jesus came into the world to do is to help us discover our true dignity and our worth as children of God. When the woman was brought before Him, Jesus looked past her ugly sin and saw her beautiful soul. When He looked

into her eyes, He saw one of the souls for whom He was about to offer His life. And He saw how different her life could be, if she would leave her sins behind and be inspired to live a good, noble and dignified life.

Some in the tradition of the Church have concluded that the woman caught in adultery was St. Mary Magdalen, who experienced a major conversion from a life of prostitution and became one of the most faithful followers of Christ. She experienced the difference it can make in life when we decide to follow Christ and be satisfied with the life of virtue He offers us. St. Mary Magdalen understood the truth of the words of St. Paul from the second reading today. St. Paul was describing how different his life was, as a result of his own dramatic conversion to Christ. He said, *“I consider everything as a loss because of the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have accepted the loss of all things and I consider them so much rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him ...”* St. Paul said that he continued to pursue a life with Christ, but did not consider that he already possessed it. Rather, he said, *“I have indeed been taken possession of by Christ.”*

This is how the woman caught in adultery must have felt. The Gospel does not tell us if she was repentant when she was caught, but if she was, in fact, St. Mary Magdalen, we know that her meeting and encounter with Christ changed her life forever. She left her sinful life behind, as Jesus told her to do, and she lived the rest of her life as if she belonged to Christ, as if she was possessed by Him.

You see, when we understand that Jesus died for us – for each one of us – we realize that we belong to Him, because He purchased us with His own blood (cf. 1Pet 1:19). By offering His life for us, Christ has redeemed us from a life of sin and offered us a life of peace. We belong to Him, but we must still choose to follow Him and live as He taught, because He respects our freedom. Like St. Paul and St. Mary Magdalen, we have to pursue a life with Christ, *“forgetting what lies behind but straining forward to what lies ahead,”* the goal of life with Christ.

On this Fifth Sunday of Lent, as we get ever closer to the commemoration of the Lord’s Passion, the Church invites us to remember the woman caught in adultery, and how Christ saved her life – not just from the death penalty, but also from the misery of sin, and how He helped her to rediscover her dignity and her beautiful soul created by God to be His beloved daughter. God wants the same for all of us. He wants us to leave our sins behind and discover the beauty and dignity of life with Christ. And whatever we might have to give up to pursue this life is only so much rubbish and nothing in comparison to what Christ offers us.