

## **FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT**

*Gospel: 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 began to teach them.

The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, 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. Now what do you say?" They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground.

When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, sir." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again."

### **REFLECTION 1:**

### **GOD IS MERCIFUL**

Last Sunday's parable of the prodigal son continues this Sunday, but this time with a woman who has been caught in the act of adultery. Instead of the prodigal son's father, we have Jesus who asks her 'Has anyone condemned you?'. She replies, 'No one,' and Jesus forgives her, saving her from imminent stoning to death and setting her on a new path. Jesus is a living expression of God's mercy, a wise and just judge who is more concerned with forgiveness and rehabilitation than with punishment and death. Prior to Jesus' encounter with the woman, he had been teaching daily in the temple while spending his nights on the Mount of Olives. Crowds had been coming to hear him and this may have angered the scribes and Pharisees who regarded themselves as Judaism's official teachers. They were feared by the people because of the way they wielded their authority, so they wanted to trap Jesus.

With the accused woman standing in full view of everyone, the scribes and Pharisees goaded Jesus for his opinion. He responded by writing on the ground twice. There has been much speculation as to what Jesus wrote. St. Jerome suggested that Jesus was detailing the sins of his accusers. While we cannot be certain what Jesus wrote, his actions showed that he was unmoved by the accusations of the self-righteous. However, his statement about casting the first stone halted the scribes and Pharisees in their tracks, it stunned them leaving them without words. All they could do was to slink away. Jesus pardoned her leaving her contrite and resolute to live in that loving mercy he had shown her. 'It's hardly an exaggeration' wrote Pope Francis, 'to say that God's Love is a visceral love, it gushes forth from the depths naturally, full of tenderness, compassion, indulgence and mercy.' We experience the mercy of God incarnated in the words and actions of Jesus. While others were willing and even eager to stone the woman for adultery, Jesus asked them to look within themselves and see themselves for who they were - sinners. He challenges them to look beyond the law that legislates such an action and to look to God instead. If they stood in truth before God, could they in all honesty condemn and execute a fellow sinner?

With those challenges of Jesus in mind, how will we tend to the poor who need and desire our mercy and forgiveness? If we say the 'Our Father' and profess to belong to Christ, there can be no other way for us than the way of mercy. As Pope Francis put it; 'It is absolutely essential for the Church and for the credibility of her message that she live and testify to mercy'. Be merciful as God is merciful.