

Isaiah 43:16-21
Philippians 3:8-14
John 8:1-11

From Adam and Eve, right down to the present day, we human beings seems to delight in doing things that we know darn well we shouldn't be doing. We rationalize bad behavior by telling ourselves that we're not really hurting anybody, or we're just going along with the crowd. But the truth is, doing something wrong can be exciting. What's more, the thought of getting away with it can be even more exciting. The problem with wrongdoing is that there's really no such thing as a clean get away. Sooner or later, secrets come to light, and we're forced to face the consequences of our actions. And that brings us to the eighth chapter of John's Gospel where a group of Scribes and Pharisees confront Jesus with a woman caught in adultery.

Before getting to the meat of the story, it's helpful to know that all through the seventh chapter of John's gospel, Jesus had been involved in controversies with his opponents as he taught in the Temple. From there, Jesus goes to the Mount of Olives to pray. Returning to the Temple square the next morning, there is another confrontation. A woman has been dragged from an adulterous act with a man not her husband, and stands cowering in the midst of her accusers, the scribes and Pharisees. With mock reverence for the "Teacher," they put the case to Jesus who is really the target of their trial. Under the law adulterers are to be stoned to death. If Jesus argues that the woman should not be stoned, he violates Mosaic Law and community tradition. If he argues that the woman should be stoned, Jesus will violate his own teachings of mercy and compassion, and prove to be a charlatan who preaches one thing and does another. Additionally, if he argues for stoning he can also be accused of being a revolutionary because Mosaic law notwithstanding, only the Roman authorities can order executions. So having set up this double bind, the scribes and Pharisees ask Jesus "Now, what do you say? So the trap is set, at the expense of the woman, who means nothing to them other than as bait to disgrace Jesus.

But Jesus doesn't answer. He simply bends down and writes in the dirt. It's interesting to speculate what exactly Jesus might have written. Some scholars think he wrote the sins of the scribes and Pharisees. Others believe that Jesus was only doodling, biding his time, giving these so-called religious men time to think about what exactly they were doing. Bent over, silent, eyes fixed on the ground, Jesus assumes the same position as the cowering woman. Then he stands up, and levels an unexpected challenge to the accusers - "Let anyone among you without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." Then he bends down again, and continues doodling, waiting for the men around him to look into their own hearts, rather than the law. And the tables are turned. Jesus and the woman are no longer on trial, but the scribes and the Pharisees are. In a culture where honor and shame are a

powerful ethic, they had been caught in their own hypocrisy. Moses prescribes stoning as the punishment for adultery. But the law doesn't permit doing anything you want. The scribes and Pharisees had horribly and publicly shamed the woman. But where was the man? Did the scribes and Pharisees just let him go? He was equally guilty, and equally subject to stoning under the law. As such it appears that these men didn't care enough about the Law of Moses to actually keep it. So, one by one they drift away.

Scripture is silent about what they might have thought and felt as they wandered off. But Jesus' compassion, mercy and forgiveness may well have made them realize how shameful merciless their actions had been. They had treated this woman in ways they would never have treated their wives, daughters, granddaughters, or sisters. Only after they left, does Jesus turn his attention back to the woman. Now for the first time she is recognized as a human being. Jesus refuses to judge by appearances or legalisms. And only one stone is thrown in this incident. The stone of mercy that Jesus casts toward a devastated and violated woman, as he assures her that no one has condemned her, and neither does he. Jesus' concern is more for her future than her past. There's no moralizing lecture, only a powerful command of love lived for her at a moment of great risk to them both. As we prepare the table and move toward next Sunday and Holy Week, remember that that powerful command of love was lived for us too – So go your way and sin no more!

Presider: Let us come before God praying for the needs of our world with our minds and hearts lifted to God's upward calling. Our response: **O God, come and help us!**

1. We pray for Pope Francis and his continued good health and strength / to do the difficult work of shepherding the church / toward the vision set forth by Jesus / in his mission and message of mercy / We pray ...
2. For awareness of the great things God has done for us; / for a heightened ability to appreciate relationships over earthly treasures and desires / We pray ...
3. For an ability to forgive, / to quickly and lovingly mend broken relationships, / and to refrain from judgment and criticism / We pray ...
4. For safe passage for all migrants and refugees fleeing corrupt and war-torn countries // for a greater understanding of our Catholic social teaching so as to live in solidarity with the afflicted // We pray ...
5. For Pope Francis' April intention // for doctors and their humanitarian collaborators who work in war zones, / risking their lives to save the lives of others // for all who are sick and for their caregivers; / for compassion for all who suffer // We pray ...
6. For our deceased loved ones // and for all enrolled in our St Agnes Perpetual Memorial // for those who will die alone today / and for all who die without the faith of Christ // We pray ...

The parish community would like to support you in prayer.
Please share with us your needs and intentions.

Presider: God of mercy, we lift these prayers to you that you will change our hearts, so we may better respond to the needs of our brothers and sisters. We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.