

Hear us, O Lord, as we come to You burdened with our guilt, and bow in faith at Your feet. Speak to us Your word of absolution; say to our souls, "Your sins be forgiven You"; that with good courage we may rise up and go forth to serve You, now and all our days, to the glory of Your holy name. Amen. (Parish Prayers, ed. Frank Colquhoun, p. 125)

[[They went each to his own house, but 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 women. So what do you say?" 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 on the ground. But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus stood 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 from now on sin no more."]]¹

In Christ Jesus, who was sent by the Father, not to condemn the world of sinners, but to save them, you and me included, dear fellow redeemed:

Prior to Pope Francis' visit to the United States, he announced that during the Roman church's upcoming year of Jubilee, starting in December, he would allow all priests to forgive women who have had abortions. In the Catholic church, abortion is a grave sin that calls for excommunication. Normally it is only senior church officials who could offer forgiveness for such a grievous offense.

This was received by most of the mass media with jubilation that the Pope should show himself to be so benevolent and merciful. But what is wrong with this? Several things: 1. There is no ranking of sin before God,

¹ Our text is not included in the earliest manuscripts of the Gospel of John, which we now have available. Modern English translations will note this. However even if it was added later by the Church it is in conformity with the faith once given to us by our Lord in His inspired Word.

without Christ all sin damns to hell forever; 2. Christ has forgiven all sins of all sinners. 3. Absolution or forgiveness is to be spoken to the penitent sinner without conditions; 4. The office of keys to forgive or not to forgive sin is given by our Lord to His whole Church (most Christians will seek out their pastor because his office assures the penitent of confidentiality; but all Christians have the right AND responsibility to speak forgiveness to the penitent sinner).

Our text for today shows a similar misunderstanding of the merciful heart of God by those who claim to follow Him. But by words and actions Jesus challenges them in their wrongful attitudes towards their fellow sinners. By God's grace we have been set free from all such distortions, which can have dreadful eternal consequences. So as we apply the lesson of this text to our lives - **Be of Good Cheer, Jesus Speaks**. Jesus speaks to us even today like He is reported to have spoken to this woman and all condemnation spoken by the world and by hell itself fall harmlessly to the ground. Jesus' words raise us up to life.

I

Interestingly these hypocritical Pharisees and scribes bring the woman caught in the adulterous affair, but not her male partner. She was caught in the act, they said. One wonders if the father of the aborted baby has to see a Roman Bishop today for forgiveness for his part in such a sin. Or is it only the mother? So it is when sinful people take to themselves the power to condemn, it becomes a delight to declare others condemned and thereby think they have elevated themselves as being more righteous at least before their fellowmen if not before God.

What sins have you not been caught in this past week? Gives you power to judge and condemn others, does it not, when you can maintain the façade of holiness? But what if you do get caught? You may have your excuses all well rehearsed ready to declare. But if they are not accepted, then you will have no other recourse but to plead for mercy from your accusers.

Jesus disarmed this woman's accusers by finally saying to them: "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her."

They continued to taunt Jesus with their question about the legality of stoning an adulterer, but those words of our Lord silenced them. We are told that they all left, the older ones first. It was very likely not because their arthritis made them unable to stand any longer, but they had much longer lists of their own sin, which condemned them. But not even the younger men could lie about having such lists of their own. We can also well imagine in their leaving the large heavy stones made a slow drumbeat of self-incrimination as they fell to the ground. Oh that they would have stayed to hear Jesus speak to a sinner like themselves.

II

“Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus stood 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.’” Oh what good cheer, Jesus speaks and absolves this woman! Jesus did not speak feeble sounding words like *“Its alright, its okay, no problem”*. She was guilty but with a word she was forgiven. How powerfully refreshing for the sinner who cannot justify him/herself to hear from God Himself: *“your sin is forgiven”*.

In our Gospel lesson we heard this life-restoring message spoken to the paralyzed man lowered through the roof before Jesus. Again Jesus’ enemies wanted to strip Him of this power and authority, but with the command to this man to get up and walk, the people understood that this authority was being given from heaven to them. As Jesus said to Peter as the representative of the entire Christian Church: “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” And again Jesus tells us His believers, “whoever hears you, hears Me.”

Jesus has instituted the way in which we hear Him speak the powerful and effective words of forgiveness to us today. One wonders what Jesus was drawing in the dirt as His enemies pressed down upon Him hard with their questions. Perhaps He wrote some familiar passages like though our sins are as scarlet they shall be white as snow. Perhaps He even drew the image of a cross. After all it would be on that cross that our Lord would answer all the charges against us with His holy precious blood.

Even this woman's act of adultery would be paid for her by our Lord. The women who are guilty of abortion and long to be forgiven had the holy precious blood shed for them too. The male partners of all such women have had their fornications, adulteries, murders paid for by that same holy blood. And you, you who have not been caught by your neighbors in your sin against them this week, you too have been forgiven by this act of holy sacrifice by your Lord.

You and I get to assemble here regularly and hear that all our sins are forgiven and we joyfully get to respond with the Apostle Paul who also thirsted for that heavenly righteousness found in his Lord Jesus, when he said: "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" In answer he writes: "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! ... There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

Now we who live in this daily forgiveness, trusting in Christ Jesus alone for salvation from our sin, know that this is not a license to sin. The unbelieving world would taunt us with such a perversion insisting that if we have full and free forgiveness, we will just go out and sin all the more. But notice the close of this text: "Jesus said [to the woman], 'Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.'" Do you think she ever sinned again? Well, of course she did, perhaps not committing the same sin in which she had been caught, but certainly she sinned daily just like you my fellow absolved sinners. But in our daily repentance, the Spirit works in us the desire to amend our sinful ways and live according to the holy will of our Savior God.

Do you recall how Judas returned to the chief priests with the 30 pieces of silver confessing that he had betrayed innocent blood? The response of these worthless office holders was something like: "what is it to us, you take care of it." Of course they were a party to the sin since they were the source of that money, but they failed miserably to speak the cheerful message that his sin was all forgiven in the Christ whom he had betrayed. In despair he hanged himself.

Do not take this declaration of forgiveness lightly my fellow sinners. It is your lifeline. If you are finding that hearing it week after week spoken

here is not giving you relief from your guilt and shame, then go to one of your pastors and make confession. He will hear your admission of your sin and will immediately pronounce upon you the forgiveness of that sin and all your sin.

Jesus did not leave us today without His life-giving voice. It gives us life without condition concerning the severity of our sin, the frequency of our sin, the multiplicity of our sin. The self-righteous hypocritical sinners directed by the pit of hell place limits on how and when and for how much a stingy conditional forgiveness may be meted out. Go to where Jesus has told you He is to be found and be of good cheer all your days in this life and for the life to come - Jesus speaks to you the liberating everlasting message of forgiveness - "your sins, which are many, are all forgiven you." Amen.