

HOMILY for 5th SUNDAY of LENT – Year C

This Sunday's Gospel talks about Jesus' message to the crowd "Let the one who is without sin cast the stone at the sinful woman." As I reflect on that message, I'm reminded of this cute story I'd like to share with you.

Jesus was walking through the streets one day, & he noticed a group of people throwing stones at an adulteress. He stopped & said to the crowd, "Let the one who is without sin cast the first stone at this woman." All of a sudden, a big stone came out of the crowd & hit the sinful woman right on the head. Jesus stopped, taken aback, then looked up & said, "Mom...!"

Forgiveness is not easy for most people. For we do not forget past hurt easily. In addition to that, we're fond of punishments & tough punitive measures against sinners. Most of our justice system is about punishment, instead of restoring & integrating the culprit back to society. That's why we have the dilemma in today's Gospel as the Scribes & the Pharisees brought to Jesus a woman who was caught in adultery. Here's how they presented the case to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery. In the law, Moses ordered such women to be stoned. What do you have to say about the case?" The Gospel makes a little side note that they were posing this question to trap Jesus so that they could have something to accuse him of. In other words, they were not genuine in seeking a solution for the case & learning how to build up a better justice system from the Lord Jesus. Also, the fact that they brought to Jesus only the woman who was allegedly caught in adultery tells us the bias they had about the case. But, what about the man who was involved with her in this sinful act?

I shared with you in my homily for last Sunday about the Prodigal Son story that two different reconciliations need to be resolved: the one between two human beings, & the one between a good human being & God. Believe it or not, Jesus gave us the answer for that in today's Gospel. While contemplating on the case, He responded to the Scribes & the Pharisees with this answer, "Let the man among you who has no sin be the first to cast a stone at her." None of them threw a stone or pebble at the woman. They all drifted away one by one, beginning with the elders. He asked her, "Woman, where did they all disappear to? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir," she answered. Jesus then said, "Nor do I condemn you. You may go. But from now on, go & sin no more." So, Jesus showed us that our God is merciful & forgiving despite our sinful nature. We will not fully understand & appreciate it until we see our Lord being hung on the Cross for our sins in the Holy Week. Unlike us humans who look for punishment & revenge for sin, God tries to bring forgiveness & healing to a sinner. Jesus also cautions the sinful woman, "From now on, go & sin no more." That's how our Lord deals with sins & helps a sinner break away from the cycle of sin & hate.

One of the reasons why our Lord could see reconciliation more beneficial than we do is because He always wished to bring us a new life. If two parties do not reconcile, everything remains stagnant & they cannot find any life & hope in their relationship. We see that situation of having no life between the Jews & Palestinians in the Holy Land, the Shiites & the Sunnies in Mid-East, the Hindus & the Muslims in India, the Hutu & the Tutsi in Yemen, or the Russians & the Ukrainians in the old Soviet Union. We also witness how stagnant our political & social relationship is in America as people on both sides refuse to reconcile with one another. The same thing is true inside of our Christian Church as Catholics & Christians, Eastern & Western, or traditional & liberal have refused to reconcile with one another. Those stagnant relationships

have brought no life except fighting & destruction among their members. Our Lord wants to show us the way out of those stalemates & bring us new life by daring to lead God's people away from the land of slavery/Egypt. Here's how the Lord describes that new approach to us in today's First Reading, "...See, I am doing something new! ...In the desert I make a way; in the wasteland, rivers... For I put water in the desert & rivers in the wasteland for my chosen people to drink." But, our Lord does not want to stop there. He wishes to bring us eternal life & sacrificing Himself on the Cross for us. He hopes that we would follow His example & help bring new life to the world instead of remaining stagnant & refusing to reconcile with the other side.

Besides the reconciliation example of our Lord, another person who knew all about that & came home to reconcile with Jesus was Paul. The apostle shared his reconciliation experience with Jesus in today's Second Reading as following, "...For His [Christ's] sake, I have forfeited everything; I have accounted all else rubbish so that Christ may be my wealth & I may be in Him, not having any justice of my own based on observance of Law... I wish to know Christ & the power flowing from His resurrection; likewise to know how to share in His sufferings by being formed into the pattern of His death." He added, "...Brothers & sisters, I do not think of myself as having reached the finish line as I run toward the prize to which God calls me – life on high in Christ Jesus." So, Paul confessed that he sacrificed everything on earth to find a new life in Christ. He kept his focus on the death & resurrection of Christ to help him get over all of His sufferings in this life. I hope we'd do the same & cut all of our ties with the political & social relationships that would get us stuck here on earth & away from Christ. We need to learn to reconcile with the other side & bring new life to our families, Church, society, & world.

My dear brothers & sisters, reconciliation with the other side is difficult. But, our Lord made a great effort to go through with it & forgive the adulterous woman in today's Gospel. Jesus even went out of His Way to sacrifice Himself on the Cross & reconcile the whole world with God the Father. We got to follow His example & make great personal sacrifices to help bring reconciliation & a new life to our families, Church, society, & world.