

Brothers and sisters, the theme that runs through the readings is “**Divine love that unconditionally forgives our past sins**”. Next Sunday, Lent is coming to a close. It would be sad indeed if we let these days pass without deriving the spiritual benefit God wants us to attain from celebrating those mysteries. Last Sunday, we were shown how incredibly generous is God in his mercy towards those who repent, so effective is the thought of God’s mercy in helping us to turn over a new leaf in life, that the Church brings it once again today for our consideration, through the episode of the woman caught in adultery, as narrated in today’s Gospel (John 8:1-11). The two stories look alike, but there is a difference. Last Sunday, the message of God’s mercy was contained in a parable; however, in today’s Gospel, the persons are real; there is a woman of flesh and blood, caught in adultery; there are not one but many “elder brothers” all eager to condemn and destroy the erring woman, according to Mosaic law (Lev.20:10; Deut.22:22-24).

In today’s Gospel, we are given a story that illustrates in moving fashion the divine love that unconditionally forgives our past sins and leads us to the new life of grace. The Scribes and the Pharisees, who brought the adulterous woman to Jesus, personify **the harsh judgment of the Law**. The Jews demanded Jesus’ opinion on the case and insisted that he gives one: “what do you have to say (Jn. 8:5)? It was then that Jesus looked up from His writing and with unalterable calm, replied: “if there is one of you who has never committed sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her” (Jn. 8:7). No one dared to accept the challenge. Taking the opportunity, that Jesus had bent down and started writing again on the ground, ‘the accusers went away, one by one, starting with the elders’ (Jn. 8:9). Jesus’ response is brilliant. Without condoning her sin, Jesus reveals the **hypocrisy of her accusers** and at the same time restores to her a **sense of self-worth** to her.

Commenting on today’s Gospel, St. Augustine wrote at that moment, “**man’s sinfulness**” and “**God’s wonderful mercy**” met, **face to face**. Jesus concluded the incident in a simple yet extremely delicate way: in fact, one cannot avoid being moved by the way Jesus brought the incident to a close;” woman, where are your accusers? Has no one condemned you? No one sir? Neither do I condemn you; go now, and sin no more” (Jn. 8:10). In the opinion of the Early Christians, Jesus’ admonishing her to go and sin no more would surely have been suggestive of the “born-again”, as the baptismal waters makes one a new creature and restores one to the dignity of God’s children, so also Jesus reconciled her to God, to her community and to herself. Only Jesus knew the love that His Father had already bestowed on that woman that she might be saved. For Jesus, she was a most precious treasure, which no matter how soiled, had to be saved at all costs. Therefore, the woman felt totally cleansed and renewed; the work had taken place from heart- to- heart, and Jesus’ brief words must have remained engraved, as with fire, in the heart of that woman for the rest of her life.

In the first reading, the Prophet Isaiah exhorts his fellow Jews to trust that God will continue to come to their aid, to rescue them and forgive their sin in spite of guilt and shame. Thus says the Lord, remember not the events of the past... see, I am doing something new (Isaiah 43:18-19)! Paul echoes the same theme in the second reading by saying I forget what lies behind me (the past) and straining forward to what lies ahead (Phil.3:13). Dear friends’ God has a plan of life for each and every one: hence we should not look back at our past; rather, look ahead, and think only of how best to make use of the wonderful opportunities that Christ gives us to attain salvation. We can imitate St. Paul’s fortitude – it is not that I have already taken hold of it or have already attained perfect maturity, but I continue my pursuit in hope that I may possess it, since I have indeed been taken possession of by Jesus Christ (Philippians 3:12). In other words, we ought to forget about our past however bleak it might have been on account of our sins. God has forgiven us never to recall them.

Finally, dear friends, we should never slowdown in our race of living a Christian life and never get discouraged if occasionally we stumble and fall. Run as fast as you can, live our Christian life to the full. Let this period of grace speeds up in our race towards heaven; Christ, our prize, injects fresh strength into us; the goal is near and soon the reward will be ours. Amen!