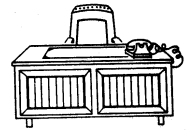


## 5th Sunday of Lent

April 7, 2019



From the Desk of  
Fr. Romanus

Dear Parishioners,

This Sunday's gospel is about the woman caught in adultery. Jesus' opposition brought her at daybreak in an effort to entrap him into either opposing the Mosaic or Roman law. They asked Jesus whether she should be stoned. After Jesus exposed their malice, the woman's accusers were afraid to condemn her.

In Jesus' time, it was important to determine daybreak when they made the first offerings in the temple. A rabbi asked his students what criteria to use to determine the end of night. One student said the night had ended when there was enough light to tell a goat from a sheep. Another said when you could distinguish an apple tree from a fig tree. The rabbi said: "A new day has arrived when you can look at a human face and see a brother or a sister." Although it was morning but for the woman's accusers the night was not over. They cannot see that it is their brother and their sister who have committed the sin. They compounded their malice by seeking to destroy Jesus under the guise of honoring the Law of Moses.

We know from other sources that the Romans had removed from the Jewish courts the authority to sentence anyone to death. It was a clever trap. If Jesus agreed with the Mosaic Law that prescribed death penalty for adultery, he would be in trouble with the Romans. On the other hand, if he rejects the Law of Moses, it will undermine his credibility with observant Jews. The scribes and Pharisees have tried this trick on other occasions, for example, by asking Jesus whether it was legitimate to pay tax to Caesar or not. Jesus was well aware what they were doing and he bent down to write on the ground. This was an act of indifference, perhaps even an insult to these authorities who expected to be taken seriously. It was as if he was tired of their little games and simply refused to debate them.

The action of writing on the ground was also an act of mercy. It took Jesus' eyes off his opposition and gave them time to reconsider their actions. He looked up and said, 'Let he who is without sin cast the first stone.' He lowered his eyes again and returned to his doodling. This gave them more time and prevented them from thinking that he was looking at them in a judgmental way. Giving them time allowed them to disperse while still maintaining some dignity. They knew that what they were doing was just as sinful as what the woman had done, and slipped away quietly and without notice.

We see here a beautiful distinction between the recognition of the sin and the condemnation of the sinner. Jesus clearly acknowledged that the woman had sinned; there is no brushing under the carpet here. He neither condemned nor punished her, but told her not to sin anymore. The woman's embarrassment was sufficient punishment. He may also have wondered where her partner in crime was in the picture. Theirs was a patriarchal society that shielded men in these kinds of crimes. As a society, we should constantly endeavor to improve our justice system so that it is ever more equitable. We should aim to re-educate and rehabilitate minor offenders. We have also to realize that some persistent offenders simply never learn.

This gospel teaches us that no one is perfect. Sometimes, we get preoccupied with other people's sins and offences that we forget ours. Before condemning others, we need to look at the person in the mirror. That is not to say we have no right to point out other people's sins, but we have to begin with ourselves. Otherwise, we are no different from the Scribes and the Pharisees. However, we should take comfort in the realization that our God is a God of mercy. The question is whether we are equally merciful and forgiving in our dealings with one another.

Have a great week.

Fr. Romanus