

Fr. John's Homily for April 3, 2022, Fifth Sunday of Lent. The Woman Caught in Adultery.

At this time of year, young boys and girls all around the world are preparing for their first Holy Communion. Teachers and catechists have been working very hard in getting their young students ready for the big day. One of their big challenges, of course, is getting them ready for the sacrament that precedes the Eucharist, the sacrament of Reconciliation. Confession. With the 10 Commandments as a starting point, they teach the many other ways that we can offend God and hurt our neighbor. Obviously, there are some sins that are, well, a little difficult to explain to a young person. Take for instance the sin of adultery. I can't imagine how a teacher would explain that to an eight year old. It's probably mentioned and then passed over rather quickly.

Now you've probably heard this story before, even recently from Deacon Jerry, but it bears repeating. The young girl goes into the confessional and the kind, old priest patiently listens to the standard list. "I disobeyed my mom and dad. I didn't do my nighttime prayers. I fought with my brother and sister. I committed adultery, I didn't feed my hamster."

"Excuse me young lady," the priest interrupts. "About that last sin. Adultery. What do you mean by adultery?"

The little girl replies, "Well that's when you behave like an adult."

Oh yes, she got that one right. And maybe there's a lesson here. Maybe there is something to be said for that admonition from Jesus that *You must be like little children to enter the kingdom of heaven*. You must be innocent.

The story of the woman caught in adultery is a very important story from scripture. For a number of different reasons. But, the very first thing we could ask is: Hey, where is the guy in the story? It says she was 'caught in the act'. But, it takes two to tango. So, what happened to the boyfriend? Is there any stoning-in-store for him? Well, no. Unfair as it may seem, back then it was a *patriarchal* society. Men ruled. Women, and children were second-class citizens. Therefore, by default, she is the guilty party and she was accused of breaking the seventh commandment.

Another thing, we know almost nothing about this woman other than that she was caught. We don't know about her culpability. There could have been mitigating circumstances. On the one hand, she could be totally at fault, but on the other hand, maybe not at fault at all. She could have been coerced or pressured, or forced into this immoral act. So we are not in any position to judge.

But the local men of the neighborhood were more than happy to pass judgment and execute the wayward woman. And those local men were also there to test Jesus. And we know how He resolves the situation. We now have this quote from the Master which people still use to this very day when they want to 'call out' someone who is being judgmental: "Let he who is without sin.....cast the first stone." It's not unlike the parable of the splinter in the other's eye and the beam in your own. It's really the same message.

Well, according to the law of law of Moses, Jesus would have been perfectly justified in at least admonishing the woman. And He could have even participated in the stoning. But He doesn't. He does not judge her because, well, He knows her. He knows her quite well. She is a daughter to the Father, and a sister to Jesus. He knew her from the moment of her conception. He knit her together in her mother's womb. In other words, she, despite her sin, is a close, personal friend of God. She is known, and deeply loved.

So when you know someone that well you would be less inclined to judge them. You know of their wounds, often inflicted in early childhood. You know about their frailties and their failures

in life, poor choice of friends, unfortunate decisions. You know about that angry husband or those disrespectful children that have made marriage and family life so disheartening. And so, if you know about all of these wounds, you could see how easy it would be for that wounded person to listen to the compliments of the man at the water cooler at work. You could see how easy it would be for that person to be attracted by his kind words, his gifts, and ultimately his invitation to take the next step. The spirit may be willing, but the flesh is weak.

And we all know about the human heart. Oh yes, the human heart. God, speaking to the prophet Jeremiah, once said, *“More tortuous than anything, is the human heart, beyond remedy, who can understand it?”* But the Lord goes on to say, *“I alone probe the mind and test the heart.”*

Fidelity, commitment, honoring one’s marriage vows; the obligations of marriage are to remain faithful, to honor one’s commitment, to fulfill one’s vows and, ultimately, to ensure that your spouse gets to heaven. If there are problems along the way, pray, hope and try not to worry. And read your Bible to be inspired in how to be calm and carry on. And don’t hesitate to ask for help. From your priest, or a good Christian marriage counselorone who promotes marriage. I would say that the experience of many priests these days is that they are the last to know that there are problems with a marriage. The wounded soul comes to the priest and says, “Father, I’m getting a divorce”. Well, where were they when the problems began? This culture and the no-fault divorce laws have made it quite easy to throw in the towel.

So if you find yourself tempted to stray, be inspired by the words of Jesus who said *“Come to me all you who are burdened and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”* And, *“The Lord is close to the brokenhearted.”* And *“Call out to him in your distress, and he will hear you and answer your prayer.”* We learn from the Prophet Malachi that *the Lord hates divorce.* And Jesus spoke about divorce and how *Moses allowed it only because of the hardness of our hearts.*

Again, our culture has not been very helpful in assisting us in remaining chaste and faithful within our relationships. Women have had their romance novels and the soap operas, and men have their pornography. And we have all suffered under the influence of rock ‘n’ roll and country and western music. But worst of all, by far, is the movies, with its graphic portrayals of immorality on the big screen.

Our world is turned upside down. We now have those who *call good evil and evil good.* We no longer know the difference between right and wrong. And we do not listen to our conscience which reminds us of the difference between the two. We look for loopholes that might excuse our behavior. We are encouraged to enter by the narrow gate, the one that leads to salvation. But unfortunately, unwisely, tragically, many choose the wide road, the one that leads to destruction. Because of this “new normal” morality, there are a lot of people who want to refer to the story of the woman caught in adultery and say, “See there, God is merciful. God is compassionate. He doesn’t judge me.” Well, God is indeed kind and compassionate, slow to anger, and rich in mercy. But, many seem to forget that all-important last line of the passage. It’s easy to overlook and convenient to ignore. But I’m sure the woman caught in adultery remembered those words and I’d like to think she took them to heart, as hard as that may have been for her. If she did not obey, it certainly would have been a great mockery of the one who had just saved her life.

Yes, there are indeed many sinful behaviors out there, but adultery is not only an offense against God, it also destroys trust and ruins relationships and ultimately wounds our world. But regardless of what our offense is, the message will always be the same. It’s there in that last line: “Now, go, and sin no more.”

+Fr. John