

LENT SUNDAY V "C"
APRIL 6/7, 2019

Think about your most hidden secret(s). If we've lived for any length of time, we all have one or more; our most hidden sin; our most embarrassing weakness. It could be something we did a long time ago or something we're struggling with right now. Imagine that suddenly this secret, humiliating fault comes out into the public, and everyone knows about it: our family, friends, coworkers, neighbors, fellow parishioners. How do I feel?

Ashamed. Angry. Afraid. Ashamed over what I did. Ashamed I gave into temptation. Angry at myself for my weakness. Angry that it became public. Afraid of what others will think of me. Afraid over what will happen now that everyone knows.

Then imagine that, just at this moment, Jesus appears right in front of you. He looks you straight in the eye and confronts you with your sin. He says, "I know what you did."

But instead of coming to point his finger and condemn you, he goes on to give you a way out—a way to start all over again. Picture him saying to you, "I know what you did. I know what you are doing now. And I still love you. I don't condemn you. I forgive you. Go and sin no more."

That's basically what happens to the woman who is thrust in front of Jesus by the Pharisees and Scribes and accused of being caught in the very act of adultery in today's Gospel scene. She has a serious sin that is brought out into the light. Thrown before Jesus by these leaders of Jerusalem, accused of adultery these religious officiants and her community threaten to carry out the death penalty for such sin: stoning her to death. She's probably experiencing many of the emotions we could relate to if our most hidden sins were exposed. She's probably already "thrown stones" of condemnation at herself even before the Jewish authorities reach to pick up physical stones to throw at her in punishment.

But just at that moment of self-condemnation and despair, when she thinks all is lost, Jesus comes and does the most unexpected thing. Jesus, the Lord and Judge of the universe,

comes not to issue a legal sentence. He comes not to condemn or punish her from having broken the Law. Instead he forgives her and offers her a second chance, a whole new start in life.

Jesus wants to do the same with us. The woman's story is our story. We all have our own tragic stories of sin and failure and the burden of guilt, shame, fear, and hurt that comes with that. Jesus wants to lift those burdens. He so much wants to shower his mercy upon us, forgive our sins, and give us a new start. He is the God of countless second chances. God doesn't "write us off"—"one, two, or three strikes and you're out—no mercy, no eternal life for you. So, don't even bother trying to change. You're hopeless." That's not the voice of God. That's the voice of the devil. The name "Satan", literally, means "accuser." No, God is on our side, rooting for us, strengthening us, and inviting us to turn back to him whenever we fall, no matter how hard the fall is.

Forgiven, Jesus still calls us to follow the moral law. As he told the woman, "Go and do not sin again." We must seek God's forgiveness for our sins and take them to the Sacrament of Reconciliation along with a desire to try our best to avoid falling into sin again. But, most importantly, remember how much God thirsts for us. He wants to remove whatever obstacles hinder our relationship with him. That's why he is so willing to forgive. All we have to do is turn to him through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, even if it has been years or decades since our last encounter with Jesus in the sacrament, tell him we're sorry, and sincerely try to do better. And if we fall again, (and we do, even the best of us) he is always there to forgive us, pick us up, and set us on our journey toward the Kingdom. In the process we become free, not just of our sins, but experience healing from our fears, hurts, and self-condemnation.

(Edward Sri, *Into His Likeness*. Ignatius Press/Augustine Institute, pp. 81-83)

"The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy." (Refrain,
Responsorial Psalm. Psalm 126)

7 April, 2019
Father Jim Secora