

May I speak in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

We mentioned last Wednesday how our gospel readings have an on-going theme, we mentioned adultery last week and here we are again.

The scribes and the Pharisees bring a woman before Jesus in the temple who had been caught “in the very act” of adultery. It takes two to tango. If they caught her, they caught him. Where was he? Why wasn't he brought before Jesus? I'm guessing here that there was a political benefit to having the man owe them a favour, and it was a very big favour, as the death penalty for adultery applied to both parties. Life was tough before anti-biotics, folks. Now because adultery carried an automatic death penalty for both parties, the involved couple would be extremely, extremely discreet. Nothing at all like the famous scene from “When Harry met Sally” They would have selected a place where they could never be accidentally discovered in a million years. Which does seem to suggest that the scribes and/or the Pharisees knew about the affair beforehand, and they were just waiting for a beneficial- to- them opportunity to reveal it.

We have records of stoning from the Mishnah, the title given to oral Jewish traditions which were combined into a single work. The accused was taken to the place of stoning, which was twice a man's height with stones below, so a cliff roughly 12' high. The first witness pushed him or her over the cliff, so that they fell face down on to the stones below.

The accused was then turned on to their back, and if they had perished in the fall, then justice had been done. If they survived the fall, then the second witness threw a large stone on to their chest. If the person died from this injury, that was the end of the stoning. If the

unfortunate person survived, then they were ‘stoned by all Israel’ which means the general public got to throw stones.

Stoning to death as a punishment still exists in Iran and Iraq, although the technique is ceremonially different, the outcome remains the same.

So the scribes and the Pharisees seek to put Jesus on the spot. In v 6 we are told “Jesus bent down and wrote with His finger on the ground.” This is the ONLY time, in the WHOLE Bible, that we are told Jesus has written anything, and we have no record of what He wrote. Why on earth not? Surely this has to be important? They persist in trying to get Jesus’ attention and He continues with His writing.

Maybe, Jesus looked from one man to another, and knowing their hearts, he wrote the names of the person that THEY were involved in an adulterous relationship with, in deed or in their dreams, and the list of names grew..... Sarah, Esther, Rachel, Hannah, Reuben....

Because they knew they were trying to trap Jesus

Jesus knew they were trying to trap him

They knew Jesus knew

Jesus knew they knew He knew

The manipulating and scheming Pharisees and scribes could not bear to remain in Jesus presence. Jesus does not reject or condemn anyone. He exposes their hearts, and they recoil, maybe in shame, possibly in anger, but they leave His presence. Leaving the woman standing there, because they want no responsibility for this situation of their own making.

Now, if you ever had any difficulty in accepting that Jesus, Christ, was True God and True Man, just listen to the question Jesus asks the woman when they are alone, v. 10 “Has no one condemned you?” The obvious answer to that obvious question would be “Oi! I thought

you were meant to be a prophet! Nought out of ten for observation, bubelah!” But in truth and in reverence, she answers “No one, sir” That is an honest answer. The men who dragged her before Jesus in condemnation were neither honest or reverent. They wanted their own way, which was for Jesus to be in trouble with the authorities, losing both face and followers, and, in achieving their aims, the woman was expendable.

The woman’s unseen partner was not honest. Entering into an adulterous relationship he was unfaithful to his wife, and, given that the woman was knowingly risking her life to be with him, we are given no clue that he fought to prevent her being dragged off by the Pharisees.

The woman brought before Jesus knows she is guilty as charged and makes no attempt to excuse or justify herself. She has no hidden agenda. She knows she is deserving of death; she knows she has sinned. Jesus knows she has been used and abused by men, in the past and in the present. It is not the act of someone with unbroken self-esteem to be willing to risk everything to be in someone’s/anyone’s arms for a short while. V. 11 “And Jesus said “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.”

Now, we can hear various evangelists and preachers inviting us to “Come to Christ” and that is the beginning of the beginning of our spiritual journeys. Because the scribes and the Pharisees certainly came to Christ, they came with their own agenda and their self-importance and their judgments and they left soon afterwards, frustrated if not actually furious. Herod was keen to meet Jesus, as he had heard about him and was hoping to see a miracle performed, which is Luke 23, 8 but Herod left Jesus’ presence disappointed. The rich young man in Luke 18 vs 18-30 sang his own praises before Jesus and then left, greatly troubled.

We are not all going to have the same events in our pasts as the unnamed woman in our gospel reading today, but what we do need to have in common is the quiet staying in Jesus’ presence, the knowing

that our sinful actions have made us deserving of death, yet Christ turns to us and gives us our freedom, and, as it says in John 8, 36 “ So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. “

Amen.