

Meditations: Sunday of the Fifth Week of Lent (Year C)

Some reflections that can assist our prayer as we draw near to Holy Week.

- Jesus forgives the adulterous woman
- Confession is a look towards the future
- Value of contrition

THE PHARISEES seem to have finally found a good opportunity to compromise Jesus. They present Him with a woman caught in adultery who, according to Jewish Law, deserves to be stoned to death. What

will the teacher from Nazareth, who had always been so ready to forgive sinners, say about this? But it seems that Jesus is not even aware of their challenge. Showing no concern, He begins to write on the ground. But since the Pharisees insist on a response, Jesus looks up and says: *Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her (Jn 8:7).*

We can imagine the woman's fear as she waited with her eyes closed for the impact of the stones. She would have been convinced that her life was about to end. And perhaps, repenting of her sins, she would contemplate that end as an act of justice. But she failed to take into account God's mercy, which surpasses all human calculations. One by one the accusers departed, and she was left alone before Jesus. Like every time we go to the sacrament of Confession, Christ

looked at her with affection and forgave her. “Receiving pardon for our sins through a priest is always a new, distinctive and unique experience. We pass from being alone with our miseries and accusers, like the woman in the Gospel, to being raised up and encouraged by the Lord who grants us a new start.”^[1]

Woman, where are they? – Jesus asks – *Has no one condemned you?* (Jn 8:10). The woman knew she had sinned, and perhaps she was waiting for the reproach of this mysterious rabbi. But our Lord, instead of reprimanding her, gives her two great treasures: God’s forgiveness and the hope of a new life. *Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again* (Jn 8:11).

SAINT PAUL writes to the Philippians: *One thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining*

forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Phil 3:13-14). Our journey of faith is always aimed at the future. We want every action in our life to be an anticipation of heaven. We are called to make the goal of our life present right now, in the small details of each day.

Every time we seek God's forgiveness we are eagerly seeking Jesus and therefore anticipating heaven. In Confession we enter into and partake of the fruits of Christ's death and resurrection. Hence in the sacrament of mercy we can experience intimately that "his nailed arms are open to each human being and they invite us to draw near to him, certain that he accepts us and clasps us in an embrace of infinite tenderness."^[2]

Knowing that we are forgiven by our Lord leads us to let go of the bad

experiences in the past, and to direct our look towards the future.

“Forward, no matter what happens!”, Saint Josemaría encouraged us.

“Cling tightly to our Lord’s hand and remember that God does not lose battles. If you should stray from him for any reason, react with the humility that will lead you to begin again and again; to play the role of the prodigal son every day, and even repeatedly during the twenty-four hours of the same day; to correct your contrite heart in Confession, which is a real miracle of God’s Love. In this wonderful Sacrament our Lord cleanses your soul and fills you with joy.”^[3]—

ACCORDING TO AN ANCIENT tradition, religious images and crucifixes in churches can be covered with a veil on this fifth Sunday of Lent. The violet color of the fabric reminds us that we are in a penitential time. The temporary

disappearance of the representations of God, the angels and the saints fosters a deeper recollection in us.

The Church has always taught that “among the penitent’s acts contrition occupies first place.”^[4] “This endeavor of conversion is not just a human work. It is the movement of a ‘contrite heart’ (Ps 51:17), drawn and moved by grace to respond to the merciful love of God who loved us first.”^[5] Hence contrition does not involve an oppressive perception of guilt, which perhaps could lead us to become discouraged each time we experience our own limitations. Rather it is the sensitivity of a heart in love that, recognizing its own sinfulness, takes advantage even of its falls to show God it still loves Him.

God wants the love we have received in the sacrament of penance to be transformed into a desire to do good, to transmit that same mercy to the

people around us. Contrition is accompanied by the desire not to offend God again – so as not to harm ourselves again – and the eagerness to distance ourselves from what can separate us from Him. Mary saw her Son bear all the sins of humanity on the Cross. We can ask the one who is refuge of sinners to help renew us each time we approach Confession contritely.

^[1] Pope Francis, Homily, 29 March 2019.

^[2] Benedict XVI, Speech, 21 March 2008.

^[3] Saint Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 214.

^[4] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1451.

^[5] *Ibid.*, no. 1428.

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