

HOMILY ~ FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT APRIL 2-3, 2022

Today I am going to use the Gospel reading to demonstrate a form of prayer called Lectio Divina. You can do this yourself at home with any scripture passage, but I will demonstrate it for you today. First, pick a scripture passage that you want to pray with. The Gospel readings for Mass are always good. Bibles divide scripture into small passages, and any of these can be used. Start by reading the passage several times until you become very familiar with it. Next, close your eyes, get comfortable, relax and retell the passage in your own words and use your imagination to embellish the passage. Add details that are implied but not stated. Next, just sit quietly and ask God what his message is for you based upon this passage. This is not what the Scripture scholars tell us, this is a personal message to you. I am going to read the Gospel, use my own imagination to embellish the passage and then I am going to ask a series of questions. As soon as you hear one that resonates with you, focus on that. There may be something else that resonates with you, so sit with that for a few minutes. Ok, get comfortable, close your eyes, put your feet flat on the floor, your hands in your lap, relax your shoulders, unclench your jaw and listen.

I was here at the temple yesterday, and Jesus was teaching. His teaching was very different than that of the Scribes and Pharisees. They teach about the law and the details of the law and tell us that we must follow the very letter of the law or we will be condemned. Jesus tells us to follow the law, but he also talks about forgiveness and that we should not condemn one another, but we should help and love one another. His teaching is convincing, and I am drawn to Jesus and his teaching. The Scribes and Pharisees do not like it. You can tell by their reactions to him and the questions they ask him. Jesus is teaching again this morning. I am glad I came. The Scribes and Pharisees are not here now. I guess they do not like Jesus. Oh, here they come together as a big group. They have a woman with them. She is shabbily dressed, and it looks as though she is coming against her will. She looks like she may be one of those poor women that do not have a husband or a father or a man to take care of her. Without a man, it is hard for a woman to survive. They are treating her kind of roughly. They throw her into the middle of the group. They say to Jesus: *“Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such a woman. So what do you say?”* Jesus does not answer right away. He is bending down and writing on the ground with his finger. I wonder if he is stalling for time. If he tells them to

follow the law, he is going to have to tell them that she should be stoned. But that would not be consistent with his teaching to forgive, that we should not condemn and that we should help and love one another. I am not sure they are following the letter of the law. The law says that there must be two witnesses to the very act of adultery. There are no witnesses here. The law also states that the man and the woman must be stoned. The man is not here. I wonder if Jesus will point this out. They keep repeating the same question to Jesus. Oh, Jesus is standing up. I wonder how he is going to respond. Jesus says: *"Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her."* That is not what I expected him to say. I am going to have to think about that. Jesus is bent down writing on the ground again. I wonder if the woman is guilty of anything. Based upon what the Scribes and Pharisees said about her, most people believe that she is guilty; but they could just be using her to trick Jesus. She is poor, powerless, vulnerable and defenseless. Many women that do not have a man to take care of them are forced into prostitution to survive. Well, I wonder what people are going to do. The Scribes and the Pharisees are walking away. I guess they realize that their attempt to trick Jesus did not work. I know I am not going to throw the first stone. I know what I have done. I am going to hide over here where no one can see me. I want to see how this turns out. Everyone is leaving one by one. Jesus is talking to the woman now. *"Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"* She replied, *"No one sir."* Then Jesus said, *"Neither do I condemn you. Go and from now on do not sin any more."* Jesus is following his own teaching. Jesus cares more about her future than her past.

Have you judged someone based upon their appearance like the people in the Gospel passage who condemned the woman because of her appearance? Are you biased against people because of their race, national origin, sex, sexual orientation or gender identity? Do you need to get to know people and not immediately judge them harshly? Do you feel the need to protect and help people, like the woman in the Gospel, who are poor, vulnerable, marginalized and defenseless? How can you do that? Have you used someone to get something that you wanted like the Scribes and the Pharisees? Have you condemned someone without ever considering that there may be a good reason for doing what they have done? Is there someone you are unable to forgive as Jesus forgives? Can you care more about preserving your future relationship with them rather than dwelling on what happened in the past?

Love & Peace,

Fr. Jim