

March 21, 2010

During the Lenten Sunday Gospel readings, we have observed Jesus proclaiming the mercy and compassion of God toward sinners. Such is the case again this Sunday when the Scribes and Pharisees bring to Him a woman caught in adultery.

There was no doubt of the woman's guilt, and the prescribed penalty of the Law was death by stoning. Jesus did not reject the Biblical commandment against adultery. However, He showed great compassion and forgiveness toward the sinner. Jesus bent down before the woman's accusers and began to write on the ground with his finger. When the accusers continued pressing Jesus to condemn the woman, He said, "Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her."

The accusers left and Jesus, in His great mercy, addressed the woman, "Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin anymore."

During this Fifth Week of Lent, parishes will offer increased opportunities for the Sacrament of Penance. Over the past four weeks, we have engaged in deeper prayer, acts of penance, almsgiving, and works of charity. As we centered our hearts more and more on the love and goodness of God, it is very likely that we became more keenly aware of our own personal sins and failures to live in response to God's love. Often, a special Lenten grace is an increased desire on our part to repent of our sins and to live more fully in accordance with the will of God.

In the Sacrament of Penance, we have the opportunity to experience the mercy of God. In the Sacrament, it is important for us to keep focused on God's gratuitous love for us. He pursues us with his relentless love. "Do not be

afraid...I have called you by name – you are mine...You are precious to me...I love you...I am with you” (Isaiah 43:1-5).

As we bring to this Sacrament our sinful actions as well as our attitudes, habits, and our weaknesses that need the infusion of God’s grace, we find comfort in God’s healing and liberating forgiveness. In God’s pardon and peace, we leave the past behind and turn with hope to the newness of tomorrow.

When Pope Benedict XVI preached at Nationals Stadium in Washington on April 17, 2008, he spoke about the power and potential of the Sacrament of Penance. “The liberating power of this Sacrament, in which our honest confession of sin is met by God’s merciful words of pardon and peace, needs to be re-discovered and re-appropriated by every Catholic. To a great extent, the renewal of the Church depends on the renewal of the practice of penance and the growth and holiness which the Sacrament both inspires and accomplishes.”

This Fifth Week of Lent is the appropriate time to turn with trust to our loving and forgiving God in this Sacrament. This is also the time for us to invite relatives, friends, or neighbors who may have been estranged from God and the Church for many years to join us in celebrating this Sacrament which extends the mercy of God to the sinner and which restores the unity of the Church that has been damaged by sin.