



### ANOTHER GREAT GOSPEL ON THE MERCY OF GOD

We are blessed in the Lenten Cycle C readings with two back to back powerful gospel stories on the awesome mercy and compassion of our God. Last Sunday, we listened to the parable of the Prodigal Son more appropriately called the parable of the Compassionate Father. This Sunday Jesus has an encounter with a woman who was caught in the act of adultery. We notice, of course, that her accusers did not bring along the man. Before I offer two reflections on this gospel, it is good to be aware that the story was a controversial one in the Early Church. It was seemingly omitted from early manuscripts. Some felt that the story was dangerous because it seemed to give a light view of adultery. Any way, we can be grateful that the story is included in the gospel text. Commenting on the story, scripture scholar William Barclay says that the story tells us several things:

- *It involved the second chance, i.e., a gift of added time and the opportunity for the woman to live her life differently. Jesus, ever the optimist, was more concerned with what a person might become rather than with what the person had been. He affirmed that human beings have a future as well as a past.*
- *It involved pity, or, better yet, compassion. While others condemned and judged, Jesus sought to understand; while others hated and denigrated the weak, Jesus offered his strength and caring to them.*
- *It involved challenge. Far from dismissing the gravity of the woman's sin and its consequences, Jesus called her to become her best self, the self that was a clearer reflection of the God in whose image she had been created.*
- *It involved belief in human nature and in the as yet untapped potential for goodness in the woman. She had sinned, yes, but in responsiveness to Jesus' word and God's grace, she would become a saint.*
- *It involved warning. The story of the unnamed adulteress reminds us that we stand beside her, rightly accused of sin. Whether it be adultery or apathy, pride or prejudice, greed, envy or lust, her story confronts us with a choice. Do we accept the*

*second chance and challenge Jesus offers or do we return to commit the familiar and almost comfortable catalogue of sins that have become so rote in our confessing? DO we dare to come away from our Lenten encounter with Jesus and live differently or not? For now, Jesus tells us, as he did the woman, Go and sin no more." but one day, Jesus will require an accounting of our responsiveness to his loving mercies. When that time comes, the consequences thereof shall be unequivocal and eternal.*

Commenting on this gospel, Fr. Flor McCarthy writes:

*As we go on in life we tend to set a higher value on the virtue of kindness—plain, ordinary, everyday kindness. When we look back on our lives we remember with regret acts of unkindness. But we recall fondly times when we acted kindly. Kindness is essential to true justice. Jesus was especially kind to individuals whom he was called to judge. The classic example is the woman caught in adultery.*

*The story warns us against being too quick to take the high moral ground. Which of us is without sin? We must learn from the example of Jesus. Jesus condemned the woman's sin, but refused to condemn her. It's not that sin didn't matter to him. It did. But he distinguished between the sin and the sinner. He condemned the sin but pardoned the sinner.*

*And his over-riding motive in all of this was compassion. It wasn't a question of being liberal (anything goes), but of being compassionate. The holier a person is the less he/she is inclined to judge others. In every human being there is a dimension which escapes the powers of judgment of any other human being.*

*Jesus refused to condemn her. But he did say to her, 'Go and sin no more.' In other words, he didn't deny her sin. He got her to own it and take responsibility for it. It's much easier to deny it, to excuse it, or blame it on others. When one faces it and deals with it, there is no more blame, or regret, or remorse, or despair.*

*The compassion and forgiveness of Jesus give life. The woman went away free—free to change her behaviour, and to regain her self-respect. Jesus reminds us that people are capable of changing if given the chance.*

*The mission of the Church is to be a place of forgiveness so that those who fail (all of us in different*

ways and degrees) may experience the love and compassion of the One who refused to condemn. The church ought to be a community of grace, a community free from legalism, a community which will not condemn but which will love, a community which is more concerned about mercy than justice.

One day a mother came to plead with Napoleon for her sons' life. The young man had committed a serious offence. The law was clear. Justice demanded his death. The emperor was determined to ensure that justice would be done. But the mother insisted, "your Excellency, I have come to ask for mercy not for justice.'

'But he does not deserve mercy,' Napoleon answered.

'Your Excellency,' said the mother, 'it would not be mercy if he deserved it.'

Mercy, of its nature, is pure gift. It is something we all stand in need of, and hence it is something we must be ready to extend to others. The Lord said "blessed are the merciful, they will obtain mercy.

### **For Paul Christ Was His Main Thing**

Books on leadership often remind leaders of the importance of being clear on the 'main thing' in their business or organization. They stress the importance of articulating clearly for themselves and their people what is the main thing and then making sure that they keep the main thing the main thing. For Paul Jesus and making known his message was the 'main thing'. After his conversion, Paul says that in contrast to knowing Christ, all else was rubbish. Before his conversion, Paul was a "self-made man", someone who saved himself by his observance of the law. After his conversion he knew clearly that his salvation depended on him keeping his eyes on Jesus and following his ways. Commenting on this reading, Patricia Sanchez writes:

*In a piece called Simplify! Simplify!, Henry David Thoreau explained his reasons for living near Walden Pond in Concord, Massachusetts from July 4, 1845 to September 6, 1847. "I went to the woods," wrote Thoreau, "because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life. . . I wanted to live deep and suck all the marrow out of life . . . To know it by experience and be able to give a true account of it." What Thoreau sought for and learned on the shore of a pond in 19th-century New England, Paul sought for and found and*

*learned in the person of Jesus Christ.*

*In Christ and with Christ, Paul learned what it was to live, truly, faithfully and purposefully. In Christ and through Christ, Paul developed a system of values by which he lived and because of which he would eventually die. Because Christ became the supreme value in his life, all else, by comparison was as nothing. This is the conviction Paul shared with his beloved Philippians and which he shares with us today. Paul's sharing prompted his readers of the first Christian century and continues to prompt 21st-century believers to take similar stock of our lives, with similar conviction, to reach the same conclusion.*

### **Ongoing Conversion of Heart**

In today's second reading, Paul also reminds us that the Christian life is a call to what is often called 'ongoing conversion'. We just don't 'get saved' one day and that is it. As married couples know all too well, marriage promises have to be renewed and lived daily. They must keep their eye on the main thing—their relationship if their marriage is going to be successful. So it is with us and our relationship with Christ. It calls us, like Paul, to keep our eyes on Jesus, and to keep running the race.

### **Next Week is Palm Sunday and the beginning of Holy Week.**

Next week we begin the holiest week of the year. During the week we celebrate the most important feasts in our church calendar: Holy Thursday, Good Friday and the Easter Vigil. I hope that your Holy Week plans will include attendance at least one if not all three of our Holy Week services. Last year after the Easter Vigil celebration, I received the following e-mail from parishioners Jeanne and George Castrataro.

*Dear Father Tobin,*

*We attended the Easter Vigil on Saturday night and wanted to thank you and all who volunteered to make it such a memorable occasion. In the past, we have avoided the Easter Vigil, always saying "it is so long". It was such a joyous occasion, our hearts were filled with happiness and we were spellbound for the entire event. The lights, readings, music, and all were magnificent. The baptisms were exhilarating, especially when the young mother and baby were both baptized together. We wanted to jump up and cheer (it was so emotional). Father, many times you announce the importance of staying for the entire Mass. On Saturday night you did not make that announcement; we understand why! No one*

would want to miss a minute of this special occasion. It was obvious the amount of planning and care that went into the preparation and everyone did a remarkable job. This beautiful service was a spiritual lifting and truly a night of celebration. We will look forward to next year's Easter Vigil. Thank you, again.

### Faith in Our Future Update

A big thank you to all who are helping us to reach our Faith in our Future Campaign goal.

<b>Our goal was</b>	<b>\$1,200,000.00</b>
<b>We received pledges totaling</b>	<b>\$1,308,932.00</b>
<b>To date we have received</b>	<b>\$1,185,703.30</b>
<b>In February we received</b>	<b>\$ 19,379.00</b>

Some of you have completed your pledge but continue to support the maintenance of our many facilities by continuing to give through the yellow envelope in the monthly envelope package. Thank you. Many who did not pledge also continue to support our facilities project through your monthly payments.

### Church Project

The church project is the last one of our Faith in Our Future projects.

Our proposed projects include:

- Renovations to the main entry of the church, which will include a covered drop off and pick up area.
- Renovations to the northern church foyer.
- A covered walkway connecting the church to the Parish Hall
- A landscaped courtyard between the church and the Parish Hall.
- A Bell Tower

Our proposed projects have been presented to and approved by the Diocesan building committee. Now we want to share our proposed plans with you. This will happen the **Sunday after Easter, April 15th, after the 9:30 and 11:30 AM Mass in the Parish Hall.**

At this time due to your ongoing generosity, we have a little over \$500,000 available in funds for this project. We really will not know for sure how much the above projects will cost until we receive bids. We will have a rough estimate for you on April 15th.

### Confessions next weekend

If you are registered in the parish you may have received from the diocese a mail out on a Reconciliation Weekend March 30-31, throughout our diocese. We work hard at

providing lots of opportunities for the Sacrament of Reconciliation, especially at this time of the year. We had hundreds of people attend our two Penance services this past Tuesday. During Holy Week, three priests are available for confessions after our Holy Thursday Eucharist and after both services on Good Friday.

Have a blessed week,

