

Last week, I spoke to you of God's mercy as undeserved love as we reflected on the story of the Prodigal Son and I told you the story of the conversion of the commandant of the Auschwitz concentration camp and the tremendous mercy of God that is shown in that account.

This week we see once again God's mercy in action. A woman caught in the act of adultery, the penalty for which was death by stoning. In a certain way, what the Scribes and Pharisees were doing was not illegal. It was in the Law of Moses that stoning was the penalty for adultery.

Leviticus 20:10: "If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall be put to death, their blood is upon them."

As a side note, Pope John Paul II, commenting on this passage asked, "Did not 2 people sin? Where is the man? Why was the crowd not also condemning him? The passage said that they were caught in the very act.

So we see at the heart of this, even though legal according to the Mosaic Law, a great injustice. Could the adulterer have been a friend of these Scribes and Pharisees? Maybe the adulterer was one of the Scribes and Pharisees.

Anyway, returning to Jesus and the woman, we see that Jesus treats her with great mercy, with undeserved love, and we see here several aspects of mercy that needs to be brought out.

First, the mercy of God leads to new life. This woman was a dead woman. Again, according to the law, they had her dead to rights. The mercy of God in Jesus gave her new life. Literally, Jesus' mercy brought her from the very brink of death to a completely new life – in an instant.

Now for a moment, let's just look at this Leviticus law. It seems pretty harsh, to our ears. Commit adultery, be put to death. Remember though that God worked with human beings where they were at the time. He couldn't ask more of them than they were ready to hear when Moses gave that law. From our modern times we can't project back our own expectations in condemnation of them.

But from the perspective of the Bible as the Word of God, even in this law we hear God speak to us. This law is a literalization, if you will, about the truth of sin. Sin kills, sin leads us to death. And Jesus' mercy, just like with the woman, leads us from the very brink of death to new life – in an instant.

The Power of the Sacrament of Confession:

- it takes about 2 minutes
- From the brink of death to a new start on life.

Another aspect of God's mercy that can be brought out of this scene is that mercy does not mean permissiveness. After the woman is not condemned by the Lord (in essence when she is forgiven), Jesus instructs her clearly: "Go, and do not sin anymore." The new life that God offers us in mercy calls us to change our ways, to leave sin behind.

Unfortunately, I think that talk of mercy and forgiveness has come to mean for some that I can continue doing what I want. We see this in how even Pope Francis' words were twisted in the infamous "Who am I to judge?" incident. Receiving God's mercy means seeking to change one's life.

During this Lenten season, especially during this Year of Mercy, God's mercy leads us to change our lives and to be led from the brink of death in our sins to a new life in Him.

**Given by Father Mark Gurtner at Our Lady of Good Hope Catholic Church, Fort Wayne, Indiana, on the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent, 2016.**