

CLOSING PRAYER:

A PRAYER FOR A CLEAN HEART

Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit
within me.

Create in me a clean heart,
open and receptive,
so that I may embrace
the many ways you choose
to visit my life.

Create in me a clean heart,
cleared of the refuse
of old battles with others
and deadly opposition with myself.

Create in me a clean heart,
purified through the daily disruptions
and the life encounters
that take me

beyond my grasping control
and ego-centeredness.

Create in me a clean heart,
freed from the clutter
of cultural enticements,
so that I can enjoy the beauty
of life's simple things
and relish the gifts

I so easily take for granted.

Create in me a clean heart,
bathed from harsh thoughts,
shame, and perfectionist tendencies,
warmly welcoming others
with the embrace of non-judgment.

Create in me a clean heart,
brushed free of frantic busyness,
so that I will have time
to dwell with you
in the listening space
of solitude
and silence.

Create in me a clean heart,
rinsed of the residue
of false messages
about my identity,
enabling my inner goodness and light
to shine through all I am and do.

Create in me a clean heart,
cleansed of anxiety and lack of trust,
restoring in me an enduring faith
in your abiding presence
and unconditional love.

Create in me a clean heart,
scrubbed of racism and prejudice,
drawing me toward all
as my sisters and brothers.

Create in me a clean heart,
washed with your mercy
and strengthened by your love,
helping me to move beyond
whatever keeps me from union with you.

Create a clean heart in me, God.
Dust off the unmindful activity
that constantly collects there.

De-clutter my heart
from harsh judgments and negativity.
Wash away my resistance
to working through difficult relationships.

Rinse off my unloving
so the beauty of my generous
and kind heart
can shine forth.

Remove whatever keeps me
from following
in your compassionate footsteps.
Amen.

—Joyce Rupp

Our Lady Chapel



Our Lady Chapel is a Roman Catholic community founded in the love of the Father, centered in Christ, and rooted in the Holy Cross tenets of building family and embracing diversity. We are united in our journey of faith through prayer and sacrament, and we seek growth through the wisdom of the Holy Spirit in liturgy and outreach, while responding to the needs of humanity.

CAMPUS MINISTRY OFFICE:

The Campus Ministry Office is located in **Our Lady Chapel**.
phone: [440] 473-3560 [office] or 216-570-9276 [cell].

THE CHOSEN:

As part of our Lenten Journey, we are going to view an episode of *The Chosen*, and follow it up with a discussion. This will take place on **Sunday, April 13 [Palm Sunday] from 11:30 AM until 1 PM. A Pizza lunch will be provided.**

The Chosen is an American Christian historical drama television series. Created, directed, and co-written by filmmaker Dallas Jenkins, it is the first multi-season series about the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. Primarily set in Judaea and Galilee in the 1st century, the series depicts the life of Jesus through the eyes of the people who interacted with him, including the apostles and disciples of Jesus, Jewish religious leaders, Roman government and military officials, and ordinary people.

In contrast with typical Bible-focused productions, Jenkins has given more depth to his scripts by adding backstories to various characters from the gospels without contradicting the material of the gospel.

Although the show has an evangelical tendency, there are consultants from three Christian faith traditions providing input. Acting as consultants are Messianic rabbi Jason Sobel from Fusion Global Ministries; Catholic priest and national director of Family Theater Productions Father David Guffey [a Holy Cross Priest]; and professor of New Testament at Biola University Dr. Doug Huffman. They review scripts and provide facts or context on the biblical, cultural, and socio-political history of the storyline.

It is hoped that this presentation will lead to other such presentations in the future. If you have any questions, please contact Father John or the chapel office [440-473-3560].

PENANCE SERVICE:

Our community celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation will be held on **Monday, April 14th at 7:00 PM.** Our service is centered around reflections by the various characters involved in the passion and death of Jesus. There will also be songs and hymns, and a time to bring ourselves from our sinful ways back to the Lord. As we confront our own sinfulness, we realize that we, too, have a part to play in the death of Jesus. The service will last about 45 minutes. There will be a time for individual confessions following the service, for those who wish to avail themselves of this opportunity. Please join us.

SCHEDULE OF HOLY WEEK/EASTER SERVICES:

- **Palm Sunday — April 12th-13th — Mass at 5:00 PM Saturday and 10:00 AM Sunday.**
- **Communal Penance Service — Monday, April 14th at 7:00 PM**
- **Virtual Bible Study on the Theology of Holy Week in Scripture on Wednesday, April 15th at 6:30 PM.**
- **Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday, April 17th at 7:00 PM.**
- **Stations of the Cross on Good Friday, April 18th at 1:00 PM.**
- **Proclamation of the Passion, Veneration of the Cross and Communion Service on Good Friday, April 18th at 3:00 PM.**
- **Easter Vigil Service will be at 8:45 PM on Saturday, April 19th.**
- **Easter Sunday Mass will be at 10:00 AM on Sunday, April 20th.**

GRAB ONTO THIS:

The inner person is the soil in which God has sown the divine likeness and image. God also sows the good seed, the roots of all wisdom, all skills, all virtues, all goodness — the seed of the divine nature.

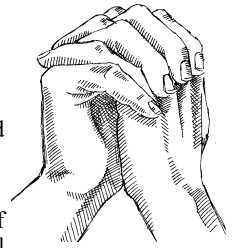
—Meister Eckhart

**PRAYER REQUESTS:**

Jesus calls us to pray for one another. Please keep all these people in your prayers.

PRAYERS FOR THE SICK:

- For Jill Thompson, who is undergoing treatment for mental health issues.
- For Mike Heryak, husband of Janet, father of Lillian ['09], Rosa ['12] and Edwin ['17] Heryak, who is seriously ill.
- For Josephine Fernando, who is seriously ill.
- For Nick Chiacchiari, father of Mark Chiacchiari ['94], father-in-law of Michelle Chiacchiari ['96], and grandfather of Aurelia ['28], and Olivia ['30] Chiacchiari, who is recovering from open heart surgery.
- For Thomas Noble who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Denise George, who is in rehab following a stroke.
- For Rick Shelby, who is recovering from open heart surgery
- For Brother Dan Kane, C.S.C., former long-time instructor at Gilmour, who is under hospice care.
- For Danielle Adams, who is recovering from surgery, and undergoing further testing.
- For Toddy McMonagle, wife of Judge James McMonagle ['62], mother of James ['80] Coakley, and sister of Francis ['67] and Clare ['72] Coakley, who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Tara Hyland Zittel ['07] who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Jeff Overman, brother of Upper school teacher, John Overman, uncle of Jack ['25], and former Gilmour student, Michael Overman., who is critically ill.
- For Hailey Grasso, who is preparing for serious surgery
- For Sister Rosemary Hammer, H.M., former religion teacher, who is recovering from surgery.
- For Brother Carl Sternberg, C.S.C., who is seriously ill and undergoing medical testing.
- For Ted Potts, father of AVI Concession specialist, Ryane Potts, who is recovering from a stroke

**PRAYERS FOR THE DECEASED:**

- For Steve Ehretsman
- For Katherine Howley, sister of Dan ['61], Lee ['65] and Tom ['68] Howley, aunt of Chris ['85], Sarah ['87], Mike ['89] Howley., Blaine Westropp ['08], Ashley Sommers Westropp ['08].
- For Sister Paulette Snyder, O.S.U.
- For John Matuska, father of Mark ['97] and Matt ['00] Matuska
- For John Love, brother of Emma Love ['17]
- For Cathy Prosser
- For Jeff Juliano, son of former Women's Club president, Elizabeth Bares Juliano, brother of James ['67] and Richard ['85] Juliano, cousin of James Bares ['80], and Gilmour Religion Teacher, Eileen Pryatel
- For Edward Utterbach, former Holy Cross Brother
- For Christopher Keller, former trustee of Gilmour.
- For Robert Hillis ['71], brother of Deborah Hillis ['73]

SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION:

Father John is available to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation with you. Please call him [440-473-3560] to arrange for this experience. All social distancing will remain in place. Always remember the Lord's invitation: "I will give them a heart with which to understand that I am the Lord. They shall be my people and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with their whole heart." [Jeremiah 24:7].



SAVED AS NEVER BEFORE:

Paul’s letter to the Church at Philippi is a textbook for those trying to build a relationship with the risen Jesus. In fact, all of the scripture readings for these last two weeks in Lent take us to the heart of what it means to be another Christ. Knowing this is essential to opening the word of God in our lives.

Proclaiming God’s word to a people in exile who believe they’ve “heard it all before,” Isaiah the prophet demonstrates that true faith isn’t just a verbal, ritual recitation of past events [Isaiah 43:16-21]. Real faith revolves around recognizing God doing something in our present life that God has never done before. That is why Isaiah speaks of the Exodus as taking place in the present, not the past — “Thus says the Lord God, opening a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters leading out chariots and horsemen, a powerful army, till they lie prostrate together never to rise”.

Then God gets to the heart of the message: “Remember not the events of the past — the things of long ago consider not. See, I am doing something new! Now it springs forth; do you not perceive it?” God’s saving events aren’t “events of the past.” Though people of faith constantly experience them, they’re not happening exactly the way they once took place. God always saves, but always does so in new ways.

I’ve experienced lots of “new things” in my faith life. Like many Catholics, I originally was taught Jesus founded the Roman Catholic Church as we know it, with its hierarchical structure, rituals, rules, and regulations. He did this to guarantee its members — after a required stay in purgatory — would eventually get into heaven. I was assured that I would achieve eternal glory by following the dictates of our Church — no matter how minute.

It took a while before I realized the implications of something Raymond Brown once said: “Jesus of Nazareth had no intention of founding a Church as we know it.” We know from our Scriptures that the first Christians gave themselves over to a person — not an institution. Paul summarizes the impact of such an ever-new faith in one sentence: “I consider everything as a loss because of the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord” [Philippians 3:8-14].

Semitic-thinking persons truly know only what they experience. Theologians through the centuries have reminded us of organized religion’s purpose — to help its members know God in their lives. Organized religion was never created to provide us just with an experience of organized religion. Mao Tse-tung observed: “No one can swim in the same river twice.” Those who form a deep relationship with another constantly experience the new. The relationship is never the same two days in a row.

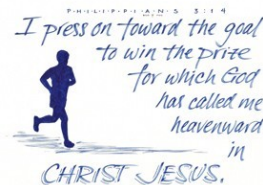
Paul reveals the depth of his ever-changing faith when he speaks about his quest to attain resurrection from the dead: “I continue my pursuit in hope that I may possess it, since I have indeed been taken possession of by Christ Jesus.” Thankfully, the Apostle hasn’t been taken possession of by an institution.
—taken from the writings of Father Roger Karban which appear on the internet

PRAYER REQUESTS:

Jesus calls us to pray for one another. Please keep all these people in your prayers.

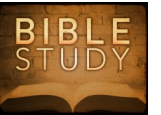
PRAYERS FOR OTHERS:

- For the victims of the earthquakes in Myanmar and Bangkok
- For an end to the war between Israel and Hamas, and Russia and Ukraine.
- For a greater respect for human life, from the moment of conception until natural death.
- For all caregivers.
- For an end to violence in our society in all of its forms.
- For all service men and women serving our country, and for their families.



NEXT BIBLE STUDY — WEDNESDAY, APRIL 16th:

Our next Virtual Bible Study will be on Wednesday, April 16th at 6:30 PM. Bible Study continues to meet bi-weekly. The Bible Study is open to everyone — all middle and high school students, college students, young adults, and all adults. We will all come together to be enriched by God’s word. It’s a great time, and a good witness of our faith to others. If you can’t come at 6:30, come when you can. Gather your favorite snack and/or drink, but be prepared to be nourished on God’s word.



Our topic: The Theology of Holy Week in Scripture

Mark your calendars and be part of this wonderful activity that will deepen your spiritual journey. **We usually will meet every other week — topic to be decided at the end of the previous meeting.** Join us. You’ll have a blast, and celebrate your faith along the way..

SCHEDULE FOR THE WEEK:

Sunday, April 6: 5thWeek in Lent	10:00 AM In-Person & Live Stream
Monday, April 7:	NO MASS
Tuesday, April 8:	NO MASS
Wednesday, April 9:	NO MASS
Thursday, April 10:	NO MASS
Friday, April 11:	NO MASS
Saturday, April 12: Palm Sunday	5:00 PM In Person only
Sunday, April 13: Palm Sunday	10:00 AM In-Person & Live Stream

SERVING THE LORD IN THE POOR — APRIL 19th:

Our Savior Lutheran Church — across the street from the Chapel — has a Food Pantry which distributes food to the community on **the third Saturday of each month.** They welcome volunteers. **On Saturday morning at 9 AM, they need help unloading the trailers and setting up items for distribution and preparing for the food pantry to open. It serves around 150 clients each time. The food pantry serves clients from 9:30 AM—1:30 PM on Saturday.**



Our Savior Lutheran’s Food Pantry was formed to serve those in emergency situations and/or with on-going need in the cities of Mayfield Heights, Mayfield Village, Highland Heights and Gates Mills. The Food Pantry respects social and cultural diversity and upholds the worth and dignity of those it serves. All those in the area with need will be served equally, as supplies allow. The food pantry is a member of the Greater Cleveland Food Bank. Please join us for a great experience.

Please let us know in the Chapel office [440-473-3560] if you would like more information or if you would like to help. This is a wonderful way to serve others. Please consider this opportunity.

A REFLECTION ON THE THEME FOR THE WEEK:

Believe it or not, we are in the season of spring...although snow is forecast for this week! This season is all the beginning of life. The readings for the Fifth Week in Lent share a profound theme of renewal and redemption. From Isaiah's prophecy of God making a way in the wilderness [Isaiah 43:16-21], to Paul's exhortation to forget the past and press on toward Christ [Philippians 3:8-14], and finally, to John's Gospel account of Jesus' merciful response to the woman caught in adultery [John 8:1-11], we see a recurring message — God's transformative power calls us to move forward, embracing grace over condemnation.

But let's begin at the beginning. The prophet Isaiah opens our reflection with a poetic recalling of the greatest historical event in the records of the nation Israel up to that date — the Exodus. While Isaiah does not mention the slavery in Egypt or Pharaoh, or the Red Sea, the people of Israel who are listening to this prophetic recital are in captivity and hold tightly to their national and religious history for comfort. The power of this poem is the announcement that while sitting in Babylon's exile, they no longer need to recall that event of their being saved. Something new — something even more salvific — is soon to take place. They are invited to look ahead where the desert will bloom, rivers will flow, and there will be new life for the people God has chosen anew.

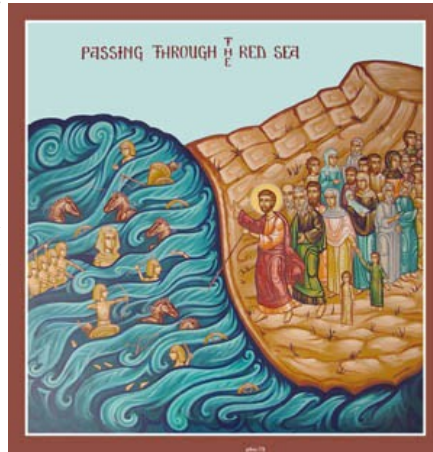
In order to feel what Isaiah is talking about, one must know what it is to be released, unbound, and freed. My father had a temper sponsored by the confusion about what he should do with us. He was caught between remembering all the things he did as a child, and which his mother — our grandmother — had told us, and what we had just done. He would send us to our rooms immediately — no "ifs", no "ands", and certainly no "buts". We would be exiled — not knowing when or if ever release would be granted. We soon learned that it would be in about ten minutes — and that was eternity! He worried, regretted, and eventually missed us. So sooner — or even sooner than that — he would come to see how we were, and if we missed him — though he never admitted this until years later.

The people of Israel missed their homeland and longed to be home as God's family. What Isaiah is reminding them about is that their many memories of their past history as a nation are about to be replaced by a "new creation" which will become a new memory-point of their loved identity.

John's Gospel [8:1-11] is a perfect example of a central theme of John and his community. A woman who has violated the holy law of Moses by being caught in the very act of adultery is brought to Jesus so that He might be shamed as is she. The woman committing adultery actually shames her husband. To regain his honor, he has to do away with the adulterous partner. It could be assumed that this is why that perpetrator is not present nor her husband. The Law dictates that she is to be stoned. Will Jesus uphold the old?

This is where the theme of renewal and redemption through grace reaches its pinnacle. The religious leaders attempt to use this situation as a trap, expecting Jesus to either contradict Mosaic Law or undermine his message of mercy. However, the response of Jesus shifts the focus from punishment to self-examination: "Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone."

This is something entirely new that Jesus is doing — he shames the honored of the community, and honors the shamed. He writes her sentence in the dirt of the earth with His finger. He is writing a sentence of release for all those who live on the earth upon which He writes here and will write with His



But this does suggest that we must be open to a new empathy towards those whose church is different than ours and to a wider understanding of what it means to belong to a particular denomination or religion. Sometimes we must repent too of our denominationalism.

Perhaps what this suggests most of all is that we must be open to a deeper understanding of the ineffability of God and the humility that asks of us. I'm still a committed Roman Catholic, but, like the Evangelist, John, I know now that Jesus has other sheep that are not of this fold [see John 10]. I'm glad for that, glad too for the words of the 14th century Persian poet, Hafiz: "Would you think it odd if I am in love with every church, and mosque, and temple, and any kind of shrine because I know it is there that people say the different names of the one God?"

—taken from the writings of Father Ronald Rolheiser, O.M.I., which appear on the internet

LENTEN REGULATIONS:

During this sacred time of Lent, each of us is called to spiritual growth — particularly through a turning away from sin. Lent is a time for "new beginnings" — a time to grow in our relationship with God and each other. There are 3 major spiritual practices during Lent to which Scripture calls us: **prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.**

**—LENTEN REGULATIONS:**

Ash Wednesday and **Good Friday** are days of **fast** for all between the ages of eighteen and fifty-nine. Fasting means that one full meal for the day is allowed, along with two light meals [snacks]. No eating between meals. Those not included in these "ages" are encouraged to take upon themselves some aspects of the fast, whenever possible.

Ash Wednesday and **All Fridays** during Lent are days of **abstinence** from meat, for those who are fourteen and older. Again, those not included in these "ages" are encouraged to participate whenever possible.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE AN ALTAR SERVER or LECTOR?

We are resuming our need for Servers and Lectors. Each and every week, we always are finding that we have a need. Ever since COVID, people seem to not have the same interest and/or desire. But these 2 ministers are so grace-filled — both from God and personally. **Any student who is in the 3rd [and up] grade is invited to become an Altar Server; any student who is in the 5th [and up] grade is invited to become a Lector.** Adults are also welcome to join in our Lectoring ministry.



These are both wonderful ministries — a great way to serve God and the faith community.

If you would like to take advantage of these opportunities, **please give your name to Father John.** You do not have to attend Gilmour to be an Altar Server, Lector, or to be involved in any other Ministry at Our Lady Chapel. **Please call the Chapel office [440-473-3560].**

NOVENA TO BLESSED BASILE MOREAU:

Blessed Basile Moreau was the founder of the Congregation of Holy Cross, to which Fr. John and the Brothers at Gilmour belong. We have two booklets with Novenas to Blessed Basile Moreau. One is used for a personal intention or healing; the other is used when praying for the intention or healing of someone other than yourself. The Novenas were composed by Father Thomas Looney, C.S.C. Many have received blessings and healings through the intercession of Blessed Basile Moreau, and now we want to extend this invitation to you and your family.



Please see Father John and he will be glad to give you the booklets.

PILGRIMS:

Pilgrims are men and women of prayer, constantly in conversation with God about what is happening around them and within them.

THE IMPERATIVE FOR ECUMENISM:

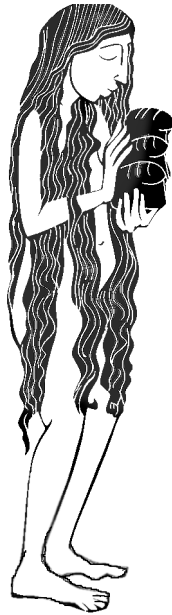
“Home is where we start from”. T.S. Eliot wrote those words, and they are true for all of us in terms of religion and our understanding of the particular denomination within which we were raised. I was born and raised a Roman Catholic with deep roots. My parents had a strong faith, and they made sure that faith and religious practice were central to every aspect of our lives. We went to Mass whenever we could — daily when it was available — went to confession at least every two weeks, prayed the rosary daily in our home, recited the Angelus together at least twice a day, learned a good number of prayers, memorized the Catholic catechism, had a picture of the pope hanging in our house, and believed that Roman Catholicism — among all religions and Christian denominations — was the sole true faith, the only fully valid religion. We didn’t believe that others — Protestants and peoples of other religions — would not go to heaven, but we were not exactly sure how this would happen, given that we believed that they were not of the true faith. Because of this, we lived in a certain suspicion of other denominations and religions, secure in our own truth, but cautious always about intermingling religiously with others, fearing that somehow what we believed might be watered-down or contaminated by religious contact with non-Roman Catholics.

And that was, and is, a good place to start from. I am deeply grateful for having such strong, conservative, religious roots. But a lot of things have changed for me since I was a young, idealistic, Roman Catholic boy growing up in an immigrant community on the Canadian prairies. Early on in my seminary years, my professors — honest scholars, and mostly Roman Catholic priests — exposed me to some wonderful Anglican and Protestant biblical scholars and theologians whose insights and commitment deepened my understanding of Jesus and helped rivet me more firmly in my own religious life.

Later on, in my seminary years, I was joined in the classroom by men and women from various Christian denominations — all of whom were studying for ministry, and all of whom had a deep commitment to Christ. Friendship with them and respect for their faith did not lead me to leave Roman Catholicism and join another denomination, but it did begin to reshape my thinking about what constitutes true faith and true religion. It helped me, too, to realize that our commonality as Christians largely dwarfs our differences.

Since my ordination I have taught and ministered in various countries and in various universities and seminaries. I have prayed with, shared faith with, lectured to, and become deep friends with men and women of every kind of denominational and religious persuasion — Anglicans, Episcopalians, Protestants, Evangelicals, Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, and sincere humanistic searchers. I have been nurtured deeply in both my faith and my spirituality by Anglican and Protestant thinkers such as C.S. Lewis, Paul Tillich, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Jim Wallis, Jurgen Moltmann, and Alan Jones, among others. Today, alongside my Roman Catholic community, among those who help anchor my religious commitment, soul mates in the faith, there are a good number of Anglicans, Episcopalians, Protestants, Evangelicals, and mates from various other religions. Their faith and friendship have helped me internalize something that Virginia Woolf once said: “Why are we so hard on each other when life is so difficult for all of us and when, in the end, we value the same things?” She was speaking about the lack of empathy between the sexes, but she could just as easily have been speaking about the lack of empathy between different denominations and different religions.

This is not to suggest that all religions are equal, or that all denominations within Christianity are equal paths to God. There is nothing parochial or narrow in believing that one’s own church is the right one or in believing that belonging to a certain church is more than a matter of historical accident or simple ecclesial taste. Deep loyalty to the truth as one perceives it is one mark of a genuine faith.



Blood. Her accusers slink off one by one into their shameful isolation. She is told to pick up her present from the past, and take it all into her future — unshamed and now honored. This is definitely a new thing, and it will ultimately redound to His being treated according to the old things. One by one, the accusers leave, recognizing their own shortcomings. Instead of condemnation, Jesus offers the woman a new beginning: “Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on, do not sin anymore.”

This passage is a powerful reflection on the nature of God’s mercy. Jesus does not deny the seriousness of sin, but prioritizes redemption over retribution. His words invite us to reflect on our own tendency to judge others while overlooking our own faults. More importantly, they remind us that no one is beyond the reach of God’s grace. Just as the woman was given a new chance, we too are called to rise from our past and walk forward in transformation.

Following this incident, Jesus proclaims that He is the “Light of the world”. The theme of “light” is strong in John’s Gospel. While the elders have brought this woman of darkness to be stoned, Jesus, as Light, illumines their darkness of heart and shines brightly as the honoring person Whose love casts out personal and collective darkness.

How do you think she lived with her new honor? Do you think that she ever picked up stones, or did she remember Him? Did she ever find a place for herself in the community of John? In this Lenten season, these Scripture readings encourage us to embrace God’s invitation to renewal — whether by letting go of past burdens, striving forward in faith, or showing mercy to others, we are reminded that God is always making a way for us, offering rivers in the wasteland of our lives.

Try reflecting on these questions to help you. What past burdens or regrets do I need to release in order to fully embrace God’s new work in my life? How can I practice mercy and grace towards others, just as Jesus demonstrated to the woman in the Gospel?

—taken from the writings of Father Rashmi Fernando, S.J. and Father Larry Gillick, S.J., which appear on the internet

MEN’S RETREAT — SAVE THE DATE:

Thursday, May 1st, from 6:00—8:30 PM will be our annual Spring Men’s Retreat. All men of Our Lady Chapel and the Gilmour Academy Men’s Club and their guests are invited to join us. We will begin with **Mass in Our Lady Chapel at 6:00 PM, and then move to the Center for Performing Arts for a light supper, and our evening of discussion, led by Fr. John.** There is no cost, but we are requesting a free will offering for the evening. If you cannot make it for Mass or for dinner, you are still welcome to attend the evening of spiritual conversation — come when you are able! Mark the date on your calendars and give yourself a treat in the Lord! **Sign up on the retreat sheet located on the easel in the narthex of Our Lady Chapel or contact Patty in the Chapel Office (440) 473-3560 or szaniszlop@gilmour.org**

**WOMEN’S EVENING OF RETREAT — SAVE THE DATE:**

Tuesday, May 6th from 6:00 PM – 8:30 PM will be our annual Women’s Spring Retreat. All women of Our Lady Chapel and the Gilmour Academy Women’s Club and their guests are invited to join us. We will begin with **Mass in Our Lady Chapel at 6:00 PM, and then move to the Center for Performing Arts for a light supper, and our evening of discussion, led by Fr. John.** There is no cost, but we are requesting a free will offering for the evening. If you cannot make it for Mass or for dinner, you are still welcome to attend the evening of spiritual conversation — come when you are able! Mark the date on your calendars and give yourself a treat in the Lord! **We will post a sign up sheet on the Easel in the coming weeks. Or you may contact Patty in the Chapel Office at (440) 473-3560 or szaniszlop@gilmour.org**

**HOW TRUE:**

Listen to your heart and trust the direction you are being pulled. Something inside you already knows what to do.

—Spring Washam

THE POWER OF GOD'S FINGER:

High up on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican, Michelangelo's magnificent painting depicts the Creation Account found in the Book of Genesis. In Michelangelo's depiction, God's finger reaches out to touch Adam's finger. Into Adam's already perfectly created body, God is about to endow Adam with an immortal soul. The hand of God is limpid, relaxed. God's finger is beckoning, not accusing, gentle, not harsh.

Recently I found a copy of that painting and meditated for a while on what was transpiring. God's creation of all else had been completed — this was His final and highest act of creation. Adam's body had been brought into being. It now was about to receive an immortal soul, and thenceforth all of Adam's descendants would, because of him, be born with immortal souls. God's profound and infinitely generous love was about to be given to us — His creatures brought into being from the slime of the earth, the descendants of Adam now ensouled—all of this because God effortlessly lifted His finger.



There are a number of instances in the Bible when we hear of God working, and the image being of Him working through His finger. In the Book of Exodus, we are told of Moses meeting God in the cloud on top of Mt. Sinai. There God gives Moses His promise to be with the Israelites throughout their journey to the Promised Land and thereafter until the end of time. At the end of that encounter, God gives Moses the tablets of stone upon which He, with His finger, had written His Ten Commandments. The Book of Exodus tells us: When the Lord had finished speaking to Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two tablets of the commandments, the stone tablets inscribed by God's own finger [see Exodus 31:18].

In John's Gospel, we hear an echo of these stupendous moments when the finger of God is at work. Here we find a woman caught in the very act of adultery [John 8:1-11]. She is dragged away and dumped at the feet of Jesus by the scribes and Pharisees who thereupon demand Jesus' judgment of the woman. The scribes and Pharisees knew what the Mosaic Law required — namely, that this woman be stoned to death. They were not in the slightest bit concerned with justice being done; rather, they were intent on trapping Jesus so that they in turn could point their fingers and accuse Jesus of transgressing the law.

Sneering and contemptuous, they were waiting for Jesus' response. They received a response they never expected — and at the same time, they missed its meaning. The response came from the finger of God. God the Son, in an act of re-creation, simply writes in the sand and the woman is made over, made whole again. Along with her, the finger of God in Christ Jesus has touched us, the sons and daughters of God made from the slime of the earth.

Lots of people have tried to guess what Jesus wrote in the dirt — the only recorded act of writing by Jesus that we find in the bible. But concentrating on what He wrote can cause us to miss the message. It really doesn't matter what He wrote. What matters is to see whose finger it is that is doing the writing. What matters for us is to see that Jesus lifted His finger to re-create us in the power of God — that power that gave us immortal souls when He created us in the first place.

A couple of other instances reinforce our understanding that Jesus brings the power of God to bear here in our world, creating, re-creating, healing, reconciling, and touching us with His powerful love. The first reported by St. Mark. There we find Jesus outside of Jewish territory up near the land that today we call Lebanon. The local people brought to Him a deaf man who also had a speech impediment. Jesus "took him off by himself away from the crowd. He put his finger into the man's ears and, spitting,

to perceive God's love working through everything — even the worst events imaginable. At every moment, God is doing something new. We're invited to recognize its springing forth.

The Scripture Readings for this 5th Week in Lent suggest that God does not mark iniquity. Like Jesus raising this woman up, God's focus is on the future — on what can happen — not what is over and done. That's what Jesus meant by saying: "Go, and from now on, sin no more." Let us resolve to be ambassadors of God's creative love and mercy.

—taken from the writings of Sister Mary McGlone, C.S.J., which appears on the internet

READINGS FOR THE WEEK:

Monday:	Daniel 13:1-9, 15-17, 19-30, 33-62 or 13:41c-62; John 8:12-20
Tuesday:	Numbers 21:4-9, John 8:21-30
Wednesday:	Daniel 3:14-20, 91-92, 95; John 8:31-42
Thursday:	Genesis 17:3-9, John 8:51-59
Friday:	Jeremiah 20:10-13, John 10:31-42
Saturday:	Ezekiel 37:21-28, John 11:45-56
Palm Sunday:	Luke 19:28-40, Isaiah 50:4-7, Philipians 2:6-11, Luke 22:14-23:56

TO HEAR THE WORDS OF MERCY:

To appreciate John's Gospel, we must see Jesus was not merely outwitting a group of guys that were out to get him. He was grappling with a genuine dilemma. Perhaps that is why he twice took time to trace letters on the ground [John 8:1-11]. When he straightened up, he announced: "Go ahead, stone the adulteress." Discerning nervous faces in the crowd, he held out a fist sized rock. "This first stone," he said, "belongs to the one without sin." Of course, Jesus knows what we hide in our hearts. Who can bear his glance? Beginning with the seniors, they left one by one.

At the end, St. Augustine says only two remained — Jesus and the woman! The woman represents our human misery — not just at being publicly shamed. Although modern novels sometimes depict adultery as an act of liberation, the reality is much different. When we turn from God, the momentary self-exaltation changes to anger, depression, and bitterness. We can consider conscience to be an irrational holdover and try to extinguish it, but conscience always has its revenge. As Chesterton observed, the person who suppresses the moral law will eventually be led to something even he considers degrading.

Just think: the woman caught in adultery once had a wedding ceremony attended by friends and family — including her parents. She no doubt had children whom she prized. How could this be happening to her? In her person we see human misery.

But Jesus wants something more. And that "more" cannot be fabricated — it can only be received. And it has a face. The one who says to the woman: "neither do I condemn you" is completed with the promise of grace: "Go, and from now on do not sin any more."

—taken from the writings of Father Phil Bloom., which appear on the internet.

WISE WORDS:

When it gets harder to love, love harder.

—Van Jones



GO AND SIN NO MORE:

Last week we heard about a wild child whose self-destructive behavior ended up sending him right back into the arms of his father. This week, John tells us the same story with different characters [John 8:1-11]. In this account, self-righteous people figure they can ensnare Jesus between fidelity to tradition and mercy.

First, a look at tradition. The Hebrew scriptures give a rather mixed message on the question of prostitution, but the strict law demanded that adultery be proven and then punished by death — for both of the people involved [see Deuteronomy 20:10]. In that light, the group testing Jesus was rather remiss: they did not bring witnesses, nor, most pointedly, did they bring the man who should have been stoned with her.

When the morality posse pushed Jesus to pronounce a judgment, he refused — just as he would when Pilate demanded an answer [see John 19:9]. Instead of letting himself be caught in their trap, Jesus bent down and began to write on the ground with his finger. The point of this gesture has little to do with what he wrote, but rather how he did it. His antagonists were talking about the law, and they all knew that their law came from the finger of God. Jesus demonstrated his authority over the law and refused to condemn the woman.

Then, in a marvelous, merciful turning of the tables, Jesus confronted the accusers, inviting anyone who had never sinned to begin the stoning. As soon as prayerful people would have heard that, they would have remembered the words of the Psalmist: “If you, Lord, mark iniquity, Lord, who can stand?” [Psalm 130:3]. In spite of the theatrical scene they had contrived, no one dared make a public declaration that they were sinless — the others knew them far too well. What an embarrassment! Their righteousness boomeranged.

The woman in this story was nameless and had been treated as an object from the time the scene opened. The accusers barely paid her any attention. They used her as nothing more than a prop, disregarding her personhood. Yet Jesus dealt with them as human beings. He didn’t retort or defend either himself or her. One can only imagine the look on his face when he dusted off his finger and stood up to look them in the eye. Did he look angry or did he gaze on each of them with compassion? Which would have been harder on them, reprimand or benevolence?

John tells us that after they all disappeared, Jesus “straightened her up” and, perhaps with a look of love, he asked her: “Where are they? Has no one condemned you?” She replied: “No one, Lord.” What a declaration! Standing before the one she called “Lord”, she herself proclaimed that no one condemned her. At that moment she could understand Isaiah’s joyful proclamation: “Thus says the Lord who opens a way in the sea. Remember not the events of the past, the things of long ago consider not; see, I am doing a new thing”. [Isaiah 43:16-21].

Note that Jesus did not ask her to repent before he said: “Neither do I condemn you.” The very experience of his care for her would bring about her change of heart. After this, she knew her own value and was beyond selling herself out for anyone — especially anyone who would abandon her as her illicit partner had obviously done. She had also experienced a mercy too great to keep to herself. Like the woman at the well [see John 4], love would impel her to become an evangelizer.

St. Paul knew the same truth that the woman had discovered. He admitted he had no righteousness of his own. Everything he was flowed from “the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus” [Philippians 3:8-14]. Because of that, no title or prestige was worth more than dung — literally. Both Paul and this woman could humbly glory in knowing they were loved beyond all reason.

As we move toward Holy Week, these readings invite us to approach the mysteries with eyes ready

touched his tongue...Instantly the man’s ears were opened, and he could speak clearly [see Mark 7:33].

Another instance occurred when Jesus had cast out something demonic from a man. Some who were there made the claim that it was by the power of the Devil that Jesus had done this. Jesus refuted them by noting that the Devil could not be working against himself and ended by noting that “if it is by the finger of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” [see Luke 11:20].

If you take a long look Michelangelo’s depiction of God’s finger reaching out to touch Adam and consider that moment when Adam was about to become fully human — someone filled with a soul destined to spend eternity with God in heaven — you can easily imagine an electric charge jumping from God’s finger into Adam’s outstretched finger.

God has gone to infinite lengths not only to touch us, but also to give us the Body and Blood of His Son as food to nourish us and sustain us in our own infirmities. And through the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ, God has made us temples of His Holy Spirit, temples in which He not only touches us but lives within us!

The connection has been made. God has gone beyond, far beyond, simply touching us. In Jesus Christ the power of God lives within us! With our fingers we can, with a boldness and faith far beyond that of Doubting Thomas, put our fingers into the Risen Christ’s wounds, our hands into His side [see John 20].

In Holy Communion we receive the power of the Son of God living within us. We have been more than merely touched by God; we have been redeemed by God who, if we complete the connection, lifts us up into the heights of heaven.

—taken from the writings of Father Charles Irvin which appear on the internet

WHEN SOMETHING WICKED THIS WAY COMES:

Does God really “confront the evildoers”? [See Psalm 34]. Or in the concrete Hebrew expression, is “the face of the Lord against” those who wreak havoc in the world? As I go about my daily rounds, I don’t always see this happening. Often, I see the opposite — the people who would sow division, discord, and hate — whether with weapons or with words — seem to be getting the upper hand. We need only look at any day’s news feeds and headlines to see innumerable instances of the powerful taking advantage of the weak, the comfortable ignoring the needy, cheaters and liars duping honest souls. To many of us, the wicked seem to be doing just fine.

Even the psalmist in Psalm 34 pauses for a moment — as if he knows that his claims about God’s activity are not altogether convincing. He too notices the prospering of those whom we may view as “wicked” or “evil” troubles us, and the suffering of seemingly innocent and good people can challenge our faith. To his credit, the psalmist doesn’t try to explain away the existence of evil. He can’t — none of us can.

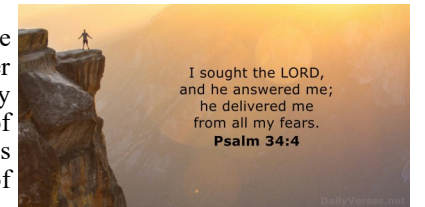
Instead, he reminds us that whenever and however our hearts are broken by evil, and our spirits crushed by wickedness, God is going to be right there with us. As Cardinal Newman wrote: “We know God is in heaven, and forget that He is also on earth.” The arrogant and unjust who reject the Lord’s love will get their comeuppance in due course. But as we wait in hopeful expectation for the unveiling of the mystery of God’s actions in the world — a mystery that will be revealed only in the fullness of time — we can seek and find comfort in God’s exquisite, protecting, ever-present compassion. And we can share that comfort with others who may need it, too.

—taken from the writings of Betsy Cahill, which appear on the internet

LIGHT:

There are two ways of spreading light: to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it.

— Edith Wharton



LOVING THE SINNER:

Hate the sin. Love the sinner. We have heard this expression hundreds of times, but it still rings true. It succinctly identifies a central teaching of Jesus. Hate the sin. Love the sinner. John's gospel might be seen as a dramatic enactment of that saying. The sin in the story is clear — the woman was caught in the very act of adultery. Everyone in the story, hates the sin — the crowd, the leaders, Jesus, even the woman herself. They are all united in hating the sin. There is a disagreement, however, on what to do with the sinner. Some believe that she should be executed, stoned for her crime. Jesus believes that she should not [John 8:1-11]. As we watch this story unfold, three things emerge — a principle, a qualification, and a command.

The principle is this: No person should be equated with his or her sin. People are responsible for their sins, but no person should be defined simply by the sins they commit. Jesus sees the sin of the woman, but he sees something more. He also sees the part of the woman that remains good, the part that could change, the hope that things could be different. This basic insight of Jesus has been reflected through subsequent centuries in Catholic teaching. For Catholics believe that the dignity and worth of every person remains despite the crimes or sins they may commit. Regardless of the horrible things that people do, we continue to believe that the image of God within them is never completely erased.

This is why the consistent teaching in the Catholic tradition has been that the taking of human life — even when legally justified — is only a last resort. This is why our present pope has spoken tirelessly throughout his pontificate against capital punishment, why he routinely appeals in almost every execution that the life of the criminal be spared. You might remember that Saint John Paul II appealed for the life of Timothy McVeigh. Why? Because the Pope believed in Jesus' fundamental principle: No person can be completely defined by his or her sin. There always remains a part of every person that is good, a part that can be loved.

Now this is a real challenge to us who would follow Christ. Because when people attack us, when people hurt us, we are strongly inclined to simply see them as bad people, as people without any worth or value. Yet the teaching of Jesus reminds us that there is more, that there remains in each person a dignity and value that cannot be taken away. We are challenged to find that value. Because it is only in claiming that hidden goodness that we can ever get beyond our hurt, even reconcile ourselves to what has happened, ever find the power to forgive. The fundamental principle, then, is that no person can be equated with his or her sin.

That leads us to the qualification. The qualification is: we must protect ourselves. Even as we try to recognize the good that remains in every person, we cannot be naïve and ignore the harm that can come from a person's actions. We must take steps to prevent people from blowing up buildings, from using violence to attain their ends. We must take steps to protect ourselves from those who would manipulate us and abuse us. Jesus says to the woman: "Go, but from now on do not sin again." Jesus is not naïve about the power of sin and neither should we be naïve.

So as followers of Christ we are caught between a principle and a qualification. We seek some way of making these two truths work together. Even as we try to protect ourselves from the actions of those who could harm us, the teaching of Jesus propels us to keep looking for the goodness and the dignity that remains in every human person. Therefore, as we try to gauge our response to those who attack or hurt us, we must do so with profound humility. We should never react in vengeance or hatred. We should always limit our response to the absolute minimum required to protect ourselves.

Yet we are usually inclined to go further. Once we have taken steps to protect ourselves, we still want to know if it is valid to strike back at the one who has hurt us. This desire leads to the command. Jesus says to those who challenge him, "Let the one here who is without sin be the first to cast a stone at her." When we ask whether we can respond in violence beyond the need to protect ourselves, Jesus says



sins have done to others, and, ultimately, to ourselves. He gave the apostles and through them the Church the power to absolve sinners, to cleanse us from our sins, the power to free us from our pain.

And then, when we are forgiven by the Lord, we don't really care if there are people standing behind us holding stones. The only thing that matters is our love relationship with the Lord has been restored. He forgives us because He has a plan for each of us. Each of us has a unique role to play in the work that Jesus began 2000 years ago. Each of us has the ability to design and construct a new detail, a new facet in the Kingdom of God. But we cannot do this when our sins and our shame force us to focus in on ourselves. His healing mercy leads us out of ourselves — leads us to look for ways to bring His Love to others.

Perhaps there are some here or some you know who are crippled by sin. Perhaps there are some of us who see ourselves as dirt, just like the scribes and Pharisees saw that woman as dirt. But she was not dirt — nor are we, or are any who have sinned. We are children of God. We cannot allow our sins to cripple us. We have to allow His Love to overwhelm us.

"Jesus Christ died on the cross to forgive sins." He took upon Himself all sin — including my sins — and including your sins.

We need strength and courage, folks. We pray for the courage to seek forgiveness from the Divine Healer, and the strength to deepen our commitment to the Lord. We pray for the strength to "go and sin no more." During these last weeks of Lent — and, really throughout our lives — we pray for the strength to lead other to Him, the strength to fulfill our unique role in His Kingdom. Crippled by sin, but overwhelmed by Love, we can join Mary Magdalene, and experience the wonders of our Resurrected Lord.

—taken from the writings for Monsignor Joseph Pellegrino, which appear on the internet.

ATTENDANCE:

If you attend Mass regularly here at Our Lady Chapel, it would be helpful if you filled out a Registration Form [name, address, phone number, children, etc.] indicating this fact, if you have not already done so. Such information not only helps us to know who is attending Our Lady Chapel; it also is of great assistance to us in record keeping [for our friend, the IRS] of any contributions which you may make.

ENVELOPES:

- When you need a **new supply** of envelopes, please feel free to take a supply of them from the table in the vestibule, or call Father John at the Campus Ministry Office [473-3560].
- When you **use** your envelope, please make sure that **your number** is on it. If you need to know your number, please call the Campus Ministry Office. Thanks.

WEEKLY OFFERING:

A collection box is located just inside the center door when you enter the chapel. Please place your offering in the collection box. Baskets will not be passed during the offertory time. Your offering will help offset chapel daily operating expenses. When you choose to use the envelopes, you can request a printout of your offerings for the year to submit to the IRS. God bless you.

Total Offerings: Saturday [3/29/25] _____ \$ 495.00

Total Offerings: Sunday [3/30/25] _____ \$ 437.00

FAITH EDUCATION — SCHEDULE:

Meeting dates for April are 6th, 13th, and 27th. Faith Education is an important part of every person's formation. Please make sure that you have not forgotten this important responsibility for your children. Our Sessions go from **8:45—9:45 AM, on Sunday mornings**, with the hope that our children would then **participate in our 10:00 AM Family Mass**. Thank you for taking care of this important responsibility.



CRIPPLED BY SIN — OVERWHELMED BY LOVE:

Have you ever gotten caught? Have you ever gotten busted for doing something you know was wrong? Is there anyone who hasn't? How do we feel when we know we have been doing something wrong, and now others know this too? When this has happened to me — and it has — I felt very much ashamed of myself. I'm sure you have felt the same way.

Can you imagine how that woman felt — the one who was dragged before Jesus [John 8:1-11]. She was caught breaking the sixth commandment. Yes, she was just a pawn in the diabolical determination of the scribes and Pharisees to discredit Jesus. And yes, she was only one of the two sinners involved. Where was the man? Still, she was forced to face the results of her sins. She was ashamed of herself. She expected to die. She probably wanted to die.

There she was — ridiculed by the religious leaders of her society. As far as they were concerned, she was dirt. She probably agreed. They would consider themselves defiled by just being in her presence. They would have to go to the Temple priests and make a sacrifice because they were so close to such a horrible person. There is no way that she would have thought that they, like her, were also sinners. So there she was, standing in front of the Teacher, standing in shame.

And Jesus bent down and began to write on the ground with his finger. He put himself in a position where He would not see either her or her accusers. And the woman — standing in her shame — experienced the Compassion and Mercy of Our God. With the awe-inspiring dynamism of His Presence — with the sheer power of His Love — He caused the Scribes and Pharisees to back down. Jesus saved the woman's physical life and then told her to preserve her spiritual life — “Neither do I accuse you; go and sin no more.” The loving dynamism that defused that murderous mob had to overwhelm this woman. Tradition says that she was Mary Magdalene. If this is true, then there is a beautiful divine irony in the fact that the first to join Jesus in heaven would be Dismas — the converted thief on the cross next to the Lord, and the first to see the Resurrected Christ would be Mary Magdalene — the converted sinner who owed her life to the compassion of the Lord.



Like this woman, full of shame — full of sin — we depend on the Healing Power of our Merciful and Compassionate Lord. There are none of us who can say unequivocally that we have never sinned — at least none of us that have any semblance of a conscience. All of us, though, can say that we are forgiven. And we can stand before the Lord — not in the hypocritical arrogance of the scribes and Pharisees — but in the humility of the woman who had been forgiven.

God loves us too much for us to continue to destroy ourselves with our self deprecation. What is it that each of us is ashamed of? We need to just go before the Lord, and recognize that He will forgive us — as long as we are determined to sin no more. The Lord does not want us to focus in on ourselves. He wants us to bring His Presence to others. I have told you time and again about the three prayers that Fr. John Fullenbach gave me several years ago. The second comes in here. If you remember, the first is **God loves me unconditionally**. The second is that **God forgives me**, and as I often tell people, He doesn't see us as a heap of forgiven stuff — He sees each of us as a person He loves and has a plan for. And then the third makes sense: **God is with me**.

God forgives us because He loves each of us, and because He has a plan for each of us. If you love someone, you cannot bear seeing that person in pain. The pain of the soul hurts much more than physical pain. Jesus knows that. He suffers with us when we ache inside ourselves, when we realize what our

we can, but only if we are without sin. That pretty much settles the matter, doesn't it? Jesus has given us a command that we cannot follow, for none of us are without sin ourselves. Clearly, if we would follow his command, there will be no throwing of stones here.

—taken from the writings of Father George Smiga, which appear on the internet

A HOLY CROSS REFLECTION:

A story is told of the Medieval Italian poet Dante Alighieri. One day during a church service, Dante was deeply immersed in meditation and failed to kneel at the proper time. His enemies hurried to the bishop and demanded that Dante be punished for his sacrilege. Dante defended himself by saying, “If those who accuse me had had their eyes and minds on God, as I had, they, too, would have failed to notice events around them, and they most certainly would not have noticed what I was doing.”

Dante is right. True worship of God is not simply a matter of performing certain actions at certain times or uttering some prayers. It is first and foremost a matter of the heart — a heart that is filled with love, forgiveness, and mercy. That certainly is the message that comes through the Scripture readings on this Fifth Week in Lent. On this 5th Week in Lent, our Scripture Readings focus on the theme of forgiveness. This is truly a Lenten theme. As with last week's gospel parable of the Prodigal Son [see Luke 15], so, too, here we see two different attitudes to the mercy of God. This time, however, it is not in a parable but in a real incident in which those with a narrow view of the mercy of God wish to use the misery of the woman caught in adultery as an opportunity for scoring points against Jesus.

The Pharisees were experts in the Law. For Jesus, the Scriptures are to be read as a way to understand the overwhelming mercy of God. In highlighting the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, Jesus calls them to repentance; He calls them to look within themselves, to see themselves for who they are — sinners. He challenges them to look beyond the Law and to look to God. If they stood in truth before God, could they, in all honesty, condemn and execute a fellow sinner? How often had they known God's mercy? Shouldn't they allow the woman mercy, too?

Elsewhere in Luke's Gospel, Jesus says: “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Do not judge and you will not be judged. Do not condemn and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven. Give and it will be given to you. For the measure you give, you will get back” [Luke 6:36].

When Saint John XXIII opened the Second Vatican Council 62 years ago, he set the tone for that great gathering with these words: “Now the Bride of Christ wishes to use the medicine of mercy rather than taking up the arms of security. ... The Catholic Church... wants to show herself a loving mother to all; patient, kind, moved by compassion and goodness.” This same message of mercy, hope, and solidarity with all of humankind has come alive again in Pope Francis, who bids us to look anew at God and at God's face of mercy as it is revealed in the biblical Word, and ultimately in God's Word made flesh — Jesus.

Christ calls us to embrace a new perspective of humankind: that we are brothers and sisters to one another; that we are called not to be judges or self-appointed executors of God's wrath on others. God reserves that for Himself. Rather, God calls us to be agents of God's forgiveness and reconciliation: “Hate the sin but love the sinner” is easier said than done. We're capable of justifying the destruction and exile of anyone who does not meet our standards of conduct. But to be faithful Disciples of Christ is to drop our stones of condemnation and self-righteousness and help restore and heal the lost, the troubled, the disappointed with whom we share the compassion of God. So, as we continue our Lenten journey, let us pray to be channels of God's love, forgiveness, and mercy.



—Father Vijai Amirtharaj, C.S.C.

LIFE and GRACE:

The gifts of grace increase as the struggles increase.

— St. Rose of Lima

WHAT IS REALLY IMPORTANT HERE?

John's gospel for this 5th Week in Lent is a very good example of how Christ himself showed mercy. Here we have the account of the woman caught in adultery [John 8:1-11]. It is an interesting story, and there are several different themes running through it. Perhaps the most obvious is the hypocrisy shown by the scribes and Pharisees who brought this woman to Jesus.

We can certainly question their motives because it is not entirely clear whether they really intend to punish the woman or are using her sin as an oblique way of attacking Jesus. Of course, by dragging the woman in front of Jesus and parading her deeds before the crowds gathered there only adds to her misery, and this shows that they are not at all interested in her rehabilitation. She has merely become a pawn in the greater game of trying to outsmart Jesus.

We could also go into the question of where her companion in adultery is lurking. If she had been caught in the act, then there was surely a man who was equally guilty, but he is nowhere to be seen. He seemingly gets off scot-free. Modern day feminists might make much of this and point out how victimized women were in those days. While this is certainly true — and really quite deplorable — it is not actually the point of the story. Or at least it is part of the story insofar as Jesus tends to defend the most powerless in society and so comes to the aid of this particular woman who is certainly being victimized.

The scribes and Pharisees want to stone the woman because they say this is what the Law of Moses demands. But we know from other sources that the Romans had removed the authority to sentence anyone to death from the Jewish courts. So what we have here is clearly a trick. According to them, if Jesus adheres to the Law of Moses then he can be denounced to the Romans, but if he rejects the Law of Moses this will undermine his credibility with observant Jews.

We know that the scribes and Pharisees have tried this trick on other occasions for example by asking Jesus whether it was legitimate to pay taxes to the Romans or not. Jesus is well aware what the Pharisees are doing and he bends down to draw on the ground. This is an act of indifference — perhaps even an insult to these local worthies who expect to be taken seriously; and we can imagine that they were affronted by Jesus doodling in the dirt. It is as if Jesus is tired of their little games and simply refuses to debate with them.

This drawing in the dust has a dramatic twist to it when Jesus stands up and looks them in the eye and says those famous words: "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone." Jesus does not actually specify sexual sin — even though the woman's sin is of this type — but one can imagine that this is how the Pharisees and the scribes interpreted his words. Suddenly they are reluctant and one by one withdraw from the scene. This leaves the two alone — Jesus and the woman. He says: "Has no one condemned you? Then neither do I condemn you, go away and don't sin anymore."



We see here a beautiful distinction between the recognition of the sin and the condemnation of the sinner. Jesus clearly acknowledges that the woman has sinned; there is no brushing under the carpet here. But he does not condemn nor punish her. He merely tells her not to sin any more. We could speculate that the woman's embarrassment was already sufficient punishment, but this is not stated in the text. I think that Jesus is simply satisfied that the woman knows that she has sinned, that she has contravened the Law of God and that this acknowledgement is sufficient. You will notice that Jesus does not ask her if she is sorry, nor does he expect her to show remorse. It is a very simple transaction: she has sinned, he shows mercy.

St Augustine summed it up in a simple phrase: "there are left the two – misery and mercy. She is miserable, he is merciful. Nothing more is required." This is a beautiful story with a profound message and it provides us with plenty of fruit for meditation. The questions we are left with though are these:

how are we to show mercy ourselves? And how is our society to best frame its laws to get the balance between mercy and punishment right.

Let us take the second of these first. I was a prison chaplain for twelve years and having observed the justice system close at hand I can tell you that there is very little that is gotten right by the legal system in this or any other country. There are countless acts of injustice perpetrated by the so-called justice system. It is a very blunt instrument, and it cannot easily take into account of individual circumstances nor is it good at distinguishing between wildly differing situations.

Yes, as a society we should constantly endeavor to improve our justice system so that it is ever fairer and more equitable. We should certainly aim to re-educate and rehabilitate offenders. But we have to also realize that some persistent offenders simply never learn and they constantly repeat their criminal behavior. Dealing with such persons is always going to be very difficult.

But what about ourselves? How do we put into practice the example of mercy that Christ shows us? First, we note that Christ does not ignore sinfulness; he always acknowledges wrongdoing. But he is not so concerned with whether it is this law or that law that is broken; what he is interested in is how people offend against the law of love. What Christ wants is for us all to love, and he is dismayed when we fall short in this regard. According to him all sin is the expression of a lack of love.

When we understand that what Christ wants above everything else is love, then we begin to understand how to exercise mercy. We realize that mercy is an expression of love. And when we analyze how a lover thinks, we soon understand that a lover constantly forgives his beloved. The lover constantly puts the best interpretation on the actions of the beloved and sees any aberrations as a mistake. The constant wish of the lover is to forgive the beloved. This is what we mean when we say that 'love is blind.'

What we as ministers of Christ's mercy have to do then is to love with a bigger and bigger heart. We have to look at those who have offended us or others with the eyes of a lover. We have to recognize that they are truly loved in the eyes of God and we have to accept them as objects of our own love. When we do this then forgiveness and mercy immediately follow.

Sometimes preachers when looking at the passage before us today put heavy emphasis on the words of Jesus: "Go and sin no more." I don't think we need to do this because if the sinner experiences a true expression of love then they will not be inclined to sin again. Love builds up a person, love edifies them; the experience of love heals them and makes them better.

This is what we need in the world: more love. Some people think we need more strictness, more moral guidelines and better and better boundaries, but I think that what we need is more love, more kindness, more goodness, more understanding, more mercy. To me this is what Jesus came to bring us — a new attitude, a new concern to put love at the very center of everything that we do.

Some have wondered what Jesus wrote on the ground. Preachers in the past have claimed that he wrote the names of all the sinners standing there or that he listed the sins each one was guilty of. Others have said that he wrote out the Ten Commandments. However, it has also been suggested that Jesus wrote on the ground and not on paper to show that written words are not important and that they are easily brushed away.

According to me the action of writing is actually also an act of mercy. It took Jesus' eyes off the scribes and Pharisees and it gave them time to consider what they were doing. He then looks up and says: 'Let he who is without sin cast the first stone.' And he lowers his eyes again and returns to his doodling. This gives them more time; it also avoids anyone thinking that he was looking at them in a judgmental way. Giving them time allows those gathered there to disappear while still maintaining their dignity. They knew that what they were doing was just as sinful as what that woman had done, but they are not judged by Jesus; he allows them to slip away quietly and without notice.

I think that we need to realize that every single thing that Jesus did was an act of mercy. The question we are left with is whether all of our actions are equally merciful.

—taken from the writings of Father Alex McAllister, S.D.S., which appear on the internet. 11