

The adulterous woman

[John 8:1-11](#)

The story of the adulterous woman starts with a conundrum set to Jesus. He is presented with two choices, having either to choose a so-called strict observance of the Law, renouncing his teaching, or adhering to his teaching and thus violating the Law.

First, I used the expression ‘so-called strict observance’ because according to the Law of Moses, both man and woman should be judged together. Where is the man? Especially since they were caught red-handed.

Second, Jesus chose an entirely different response. As a good Jewish rabbi, Jesus returns the decision to them with a twist, “Let anyone among you *who is without sin* be the *first* to throw a stone at her”. Jesus does not even say that only those without sin can stone her. Just the first one. And they all left, from the elders, usually so self-righteous” to the youngest, usually so sure of themselves. Jesus does not condemn her either and sends her on her way, with an admonition, “from now on do not sin again”.

Jesus resists temptations. God asks the disciples to listen to Jesus. Then Jesus calls for conversion and repentance. In the parable of the prodigal son, the father, representing God the Father, shows mercy. In the story of the adulterous woman, Jesus, God the Son, forgives. We too are so called.

Lent Retreat (C) – March 15, 2025 (v. 1)

The Human condition

[Luke 4:1-13](#)

Luke starts the first temptation with the words, “If you are the Son of God”. The devil seeks to turn Jesus’ strength against him, tempting him to turn his power to selfish purposes. This is a powerful temptation. We are constantly tempted to prove ourselves.

We notice that this temptation seems very insignificant. What can be the harm of one loaf of bread? It seems to be for the good. This compromise, for it is one, opens the door to a slippery slope, a deep pit, from which it becomes very difficult to escape.

The second temptation invites Jesus to worship the devil—a false god—to accomplish a good end by evil means (worshiping the devil). We, too, are often tempted to accomplish good ends by evil means. Local governments favours lotteries to raise funds for social services. Schools promote self-esteem by passing students to grades for which they are unprepared. Students pass tests by cheating, but they only cheat themselves, as it means they lack the proper blocks to get to the next level of understanding. We too are tempted to accomplish good ends by bad means. And we keep justifying our actions.

In the third temptation, the devil tempts Jesus be unfaithful to God by putting God to the test. We too often put God to the test. Look how children are constantly testing their parents. Teenagers do the same thing. We do the same. We were told that attending Sunday mass was mandatory. As a teenager or as an adult, one decides not to go one day, “I am tired or too busy”. And where is the lightning bolt that was supposed to strike me? This is a test. Another form of testing is developing a transactional attitude regarding God, “I no longer trust in God because he did not give me what I asked”. There are so many ways we are testing God, without even realizing it.

Jesus resists these temptations with two weapons. The first is the Holy Spirit, for Jesus is “full of the Holy Spirit”, and the Spirit helps him to overcome temptation. His second weapon is Scripture. Jesus quotes scripture in response to each of the three temptations. He knows scripture. His intimacy with scripture is so complete that, in his hands, scripture becomes a “sword of the Spirit” for his defense.

We received the same gift of the Holy Spirit at our baptism. The scriptures are readily available. Like Jesus, we too can resist temptations by training ourselves, developing our intimacy with God and the Scriptures, by surrendering our will to the will of God, by becoming increasingly humble,

With his reaction to his father’s mercy, the older son revealed his lack of humility. Although seemingly faithful to his father, the older brother expresses self-righteousness with his rejection of his father’s forgiveness.

Self-righteousness leads to judging others, condemning them, without compassion. Hijacking the role of God and exercising it without God’s mercy. It leads to domineering, exercising control on the lives of others, or attempting to do so, like the older son in the parable. Self-righteousness is the external expression of an internal pride that bears no opposition. The ultimate sin, a sin that excludes God while claiming doing so on God’s behalf.

The older son showed scrupulous external observance and unflinching obedience to his father. With this parable, Jesus demonstrates that attempting to buy salvation with the wrong motivation does not work.

It is the inner self, inner disposition and a spiritual life turned toward God that count. This brings us back to the Beatitudes and Jesus’ commandment, “Love God, love your neighbour, love each other as I have loved you, with all your heart, your soul, your mind”, with your entire being without reservation or restriction of any kind. Jesus’ challenge to be met every day, every second of every day, day after day, without pause.

others. Israel's mind, sin and judgment are closely linked. It is oddly comforting to believe that suffering is the result of sin, because it eliminates randomness—explains suffering—offers us a way to avoid the disasters that we see befalling others. Remember the Book of Job.

Jesus denies that the Galileans suffered because of their sins. Jesus calls his listeners to repent otherwise they would suffer for theirs. Jesus uses these stories to call his listeners to repentance. His purpose is not condemnation but redemption. The call to repentance shows that it is not too late for his listeners. Salvation is still possible.

Repentance offers an implicit promise of salvation. Repentance helps us in life and in death—helps us to live as forgiven people—helps us to face death without fear. It prepares us to live victoriously in the face of tragedy, and it also prepares us for death. Christ calls us to repent so that we might avoid the self-imposed tragedy.

The Merciful Father

[Luke 15:1-3, 11-32](#)

The fourth Sunday reminds us of the overwhelming mercy of God. Although this story is known as 'The Prodigal Son' parable, it ought to be called 'The Merciful Father'. For this is truly what is being told. The younger son was arrogant, faced hardship and learned humility from it. Humble, he returned to his father, hoping acceptance as a servant.

patient, compassionate, in short, by living the Lord's and Jesus' commandments.

Transfiguration

[Luke 9:28b-36](#)

The whole chapter 9 of Luke's gospel tries to answer the question, "Who is this"? King Herod said, "*John I beheaded, but who is this, about whom I hear such things?*" Herod sought to see Jesus but did not yet. Jesus then asked a similar question to his disciples. Peter declared that Jesus is the Messiah. Upon Peter's answer, Jesus did not confirm and described the process by which he will accomplish his work. With the story of the Transfiguration, God himself gives the most authoritative answer to the question, "Who is this?" God says, "*This is my beloved Son. Listen to him!*"

The story begins with deliberate actions by Jesus. Jesus took his three closest disciples with him up a mountain. Peter, John and James were with Jesus when he healed Jairus' daughter. They will be with Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. Going up a mountain to pray is more a theological than a geographical statement. Mountains are places of prayer, and it is on mountains that many significant encounters with God take place.

Jesus starts to pray. **“As he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became white and dazzling”** (v. 29). This recalls the story of Moses, who encountered God on Sinai, and whose face shone brightly “by reason of his speaking with” Yahweh.

There are many parallels between Moses in Exodus 24 and Jesus at the Transfiguration. Both incidents: (1) occur on a mountain (2) involve Moses (3) have God speaking from a cloud (4) speak of the glory of the Lord and (5) inspire fear.

Moses had prophesied, “Your God will raise up to you a prophet from the midst of you, of your brothers, like me. You shall listen to him” (Deuteronomy 18:15). At this Transfiguration, God confirms that the new Moses-like prophet is Jesus, saying, **“This is my beloved Son. Listen to him!”** (v. 35). Peter will also link the Moses’ prophecy with Jesus in a sermon shortly after Pentecost (Acts 3:22).

Luke clearly understands Jesus to be a new Moses. Moses came to set the people of Israel free from slavery in Egypt. Jesus came to set people free from sin. Jesus is NOT a military Messiah who will lead the Lord’s host as in the psalms. The disciples were not prepared to hear Jesus talk about suffering and death. The disciples will neither listen well nor carry out their tasks faithfully—until after the resurrection.

“Listen to him!” There is a sermon in these words. We listen to so many voices today, all of which seem wise and attractive. They promise us health, wealth, and happiness, but seldom live up to their promises. Is there any trustworthy voice amidst the cacophony? The voice from the cloud says that we can always trust Jesus—**“Listen to him!”**

We say, “Jesus’ teaching is too idealistic. The world in which we live is too complex, too harsh!” Or we say, “I am too busy, I have other things to do, to care for”. Or, “I am not sure that I truly believe.” The voice says, **“Listen to him!”** We are urged to heed to God’s voice. Listen as in **live** Jesus’ call for holiness; as being faithful to Jesus’ commandment of Love the Lord through your love of your neighbour as Jesus has loved us, action-love, life-giving love, **agapè**.

[A call to personal conversion](https://bible.usccb.org/bible/luke/13) <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/luke/13>

The third Sunday of Lent proposes a pair of stories calling us to repentance and the fig-tree parable.

Suffering and violent death were God’s judgment, as a sign of guilt and sin. Israel’s mind, sin and judgment are closely linked. It is oddly comforting to believe that suffering is the result of sin, because it eliminates randomness — explains suffering — a way to avoid disasters that we see befalling