

God's Infinite Mercy

Is. 43: 16-21; Ps. 126; Phil. 3: 8-14; Jn. 8: 1-11

The Israelites had been captured by the Assyrians when God, through His prophet Isaiah took their minds back to when He had demonstrated His compassion and mercy by leading them out of slavery in Egypt, providing for them for forty years as they wandered through the desert, and bringing them to the Promised Land.

But then He told the Jews that they should not focus on the things He had done for them previously because he was 'about to do a new thing' which was to deliver the Jewish people from captivity and restore them to their homeland. Imagine the joy of the Israelites each time God delivered them from bondage. God showed His mercy and compassion to them over and over again.

Hundreds of years later, Jesus was teaching in the synagogue. All of a sudden, the place was thrown into chaos. It became like a scene from a movie. A trembling woman was dragged into the synagogue and made to stand in front of Jesus and the assembly. The scribes and the Pharisees said that she had been caught in the act of adultery. They asked Jesus what should be done with her.

Everyone, including Jesus, knew that the ancient Jewish law called for an adulterer to be put to death by stoning. But Jesus knew that the Pharisees were testing him, trying to find fault with him so they could prosecute him and to have him put to death. If He authorized the stoning, He would be violating the law of the Roman occupiers that no Jew had the authority to pronounce a death sentence. If He did not call for the stoning of the woman, He would be contradicting the sacred law of Moses and all His teachings would be called into question.

Instead, Jesus turned the tables on the Pharisees by telling them that the person without sin should cast the first stone. Now the Pharisees were faced with the same dilemma into which they hoped to trap Jesus. To get themselves out of the quandary, they had to abandon the charges against the woman and walk away.

Jesus was left alone with the woman and He neither condemned her nor did He condone her sins. He simply told her to go and to not sin again. Imagine the relief and healing that took place in the woman at that moment. She knew that Jesus had saved her from a horrible death. She was given a second chance at life through the compassion and mercy of Jesus. And this is what God has done throughout history to the present day.

God continues to make His mercy available to us in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. We tremble before Jesus having examined ourselves and having identified our sins. Like the woman, we are alone with Jesus, ashamed of our sins, and fearing our punishment. But He does not condemn us. He does not chastise us. He alone has the power to forgive sins and He does this. He simply tells us to go on our way and to not sin again. Our sins have been absolved; that is, we have been set free from blame or obligation. God does not count our sins against us.

We need to acknowledge that we share the plight of the adulterous woman and are in need of the infinite mercy of God. As we continue our Lenten journey, let us avail ourselves of God's infinite mercy and allow Jesus to lift the burden of our sins so we can go our way in peace.