April 3, 2022—Fifth Sunday of Lent

The woman brought before Jesus for judgment, knew the end of her life was near. According to the Law of Moses, the punishment for adultery was stoning to death. No one would mourn at her death; no one would miss her. She had been caught in the web of sin and had nothing to show for her life.

In the Litany of Trust, written by the Sisters of Life, one of the first petitions is “**From the fear that I am unlovable, deliver me, Jesus**.” This woman, no doubt thought that she was unlovable, even by God. It is a problem that many people have today. Perhaps their life is dominated by some addiction that they hate and can’t control; or maybe they have been beaten down by the words and actions of others and believe that they are worthless; maybe they have been rejected by someone that they loved and feel empty and alone (this happens to a lot of young people whose first love and breakup hits them hard); perhaps it is the sudden loss of a job and fortune that leaves them destitute. Whatever it may be, they feel unlovable and worthless; a failure.

All of us have been caught in the web of sin with its life draining effects. That is why the Father sent His Son to be our Savior. Another petition in the Litany of Trust is: “**From the false security that I have what it takes, deliver me, Jesus**.” The effects of sin are so devastating. First, it effects our relationship with God and secondly our relationship with the Church, particularly those closest to us. Whenever I sin, I have taken a step back from what I should be and could be as a child of God.

God has set up the universe according to a just moral order. To understand this, picture one of those old balance scales with two plates; if you put a weight on one it goes down and the other goes up. You want to get both sides level so that you can know the weight of an object. God is perfectly just and established the moral order of right and wrong. When we sin, the moral order is out of balance and reparation needs to be made to restore a just world.

When we sin, ever since Original Sin, our relationship with God is out of order and needs reparation or atonement. Since God is an infinite Person and we are finite, it is impossible for us to restore that relationship on our own—even the whole human race acting together couldn’t do it! Knowing this, God doesn’t say, let’s just forget the need for justice. Instead, He sent His Son, an infinite Person, to pay back the debt through the perfect act of obedient love in His Passion and death upon the Cross. We access that Divine Mercy through the sacraments.

But that isn’t the end of the effects of sin, even the most private sin effects our relationship with others. Pope St. John Paul used the term, “the communion of sin.” Reparation needs to be done to repair this violation of the moral order and restore the relationships that have been damaged to individuals and humanity as a whole. Although Jesus’ saving death and resurrection have done the most part, here is where God wants us to play a little part through repentance, penance and self-sacrifice. We cannot ignore this work that we need to do to make up for what we call, the temporal punishment for sin. The deeds of love heal the wound of sin.

The woman caught in adultery and facing the ultimate punishment, encountered not only the just God, but the merciful God in person. Pope St. John Paul wrote in his encyclical, On the Mercy of God (Dives in Misericordia), “**This love is able to reach down to every prodigal son, to every human misery, and above all to every form of moral misery, to sin. When this happens, the person who is the object of mercy does not feel humiliated, but rather found again and restored to value**.”

We have a hard time believing in this because the love of God is so great, beyond our understanding! The Litany of Trust continues: “**From the fear that trusting You will leave me more destitute, deliver me, Jesus. From all suspicion of Your words and promises, deliver me, Jesus.**” God willingly gives us His forgiveness, but we must trust in it. Also, we can only receive healing if we are willing to forgive others who have hurt or offended us and refuse to dwell on it when the past wound comes to our mind again. The imagination will not easily let things go; it can trigger past wounds or addictions. The Litany of Trust prays: “**From resentment or excessive preoccupation with the past, deliver me, Jesus. From restless self-seeking in the present moment, deliver me, Jesus.**”

Jesus doesn’t fall into the trap of the Pharisees and scribes, but brilliantly turns the table upon them by saying: “**Let the one among you who is without sin cast the first stone.**” They couldn’t cast a stone because that would be capital punishment and the Romans would have arrested them, so they must walk away shamefaced and defeated. When they have all gone, Jesus asked the woman, “**Where are they? Has no one condemned you**.” In the next words of Jesus, she discovers that God has not abandoned her; that God loves her and has restored her value and dignity: “**Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin any more**.”

She will eventually learn that God came into our world to pay back the debt of her sin; to make reparation for her, Himself. Do you know that He did it for you, too?