
Fr Christopher Mathaha

Homily (7 April 2019)

We are sinners already forgiven, conquered by Christ.

"Neither do I condemn you. From now on, do not sin anymore". We know nothing much about this adulterous woman who was already condemned by Scribes and Pharisees, ready to be stoned but rescued with verbal stones from Jesus. Jesus threw a verbal stone: *"He who has no sin should be the first to throw their stone of judgment"*. We see them all leaving starting with the eldest, the most sinful, meaning they were no longer interested in judging the adultery of the woman because they carried worse / heavier sins themselves. The stones they carried signified the weight of their sin. They realise that they cannot be judges of adultery while they were guilty of sins that cause suffering, division, tribalism, xenophobia, injustice, corruption, kleptomania and capital punishment, defamation of character, abortion, apostasy and death. Maybe one of the old men counted his occasions of adultery and realised they far surpass those of this armature adulterous woman. He could teach her a few lessons in adultery himself. Why did they not bring her accomplice? Simply because in their theology men did not commit adultery, they got tempted, they got seduced, and they never took initiative, wow. All were sinners carrying stones each symbolising their sins which they wanted to conceal by exposing that of this poor woman. Jesus in return throws at them a verbal stone of examination of conscience and each one of them withdraws because they realise they are worse than the woman. The worst sin we commit is inability to realise when we have sinned. What the media like Jesus is writing on the sand about us Catholic priests is not good at all. It exposes rot of ages and like the Pharisees, Scribes and the spectators we too must withdraw from being moral judges and clean our house first.

This nameless woman is guilty as charged having been caught in the act. But like in the story of Susannah, there are discrepancies in this accusation. It is again elders using women for their pleasure. That time Susannah was saved by young prophet Daniel, today the woman is saved by the king of life himself. I am not here to condemn but to proclaim good news to the captives, sinners caught in adultery. In today's gospel, there is no notion that she has to make satisfaction as found in Sacramental theology, especially the sacrament of Reconciliation that calls for penance, contrition, satisfaction and absolution. Jesus survives the trap of being a self - proclaimed judge, a trap of breaking the Seal of confession and refuses to discuss the sin of the woman. He survives partaking in a kangaroo court under the influence of mob justice. How often do we sin because others are doing it, majority says it, and we want to belong? She should in fact confess free of coercion and not be pressurised by the crowd. You do not approach the sacrament of reconciliation unless you are prepared to sin no more as Jesus demands. You cannot confess to cohabitation if you are not prepared to abandon cohabitation, you cannot justify adultery, prostitution by claiming you were making school fees money. Infidelity does not justify femicide, unemployment does not justify theft.

It is not about why you sinned but what you can learn from your sin. Jesus writes with the hand of God in the sand just as out of clay he created humanity. He presents a moment of renewal, restoration of sanctifying grace, recouping our original goodness before committing original sin. Use Lenten time to also renew your life, forget your past mistakes, do not allow them to depress you but utilise them to shape your future. St. Augustine was a womaniser of

the better rather than condemning them. Paul was a mercenary for Judaism but after his Damascus experience became a great theologian to the Gentiles. You may be the face of ponds, the face of SAB products, the face of supplementary exams, our academic St. John Vianney, the face of Stuyvesant and the face of fresh gossip but today you are invited to throw away this stone of notoriety and leave this celebration a changed person. You who are leaving next month, you should leave the seminary matured men ready to change the face of Catholic priesthood for the better. Restore faith to this magnificent ministry and stop doing the same mistakes that we did. Every time we say *Ite missa est* - go in peace mass is ended, we are reminding you like Jesus reminds this nameless woman, the face of adultery, that you are commissioned to go and renew the face of the earth. You are being offered a second chance to be better persons.

This episode of the adulterous woman exposes some of the failings of male dominated Christian society, of the Catholic Church obsessed with Clericalism. No man could commit adultery, monna ke selepe oa a dingoana, the same men enjoying this nameless woman are the ones condemning her, and she is nameless whereas they are titled. No wonder today we have feminist theology. Women have had enough of our abuse. Let us resolve as future priests to stop this vicious circle of abusing young and vulnerable women. Today we walk with shame like the condemning mob that Jesus invites to deal with their failings first. The sin of abuse of minors has become a heavy stone to carry around for us Catholic Clergy. Go and change this undesirable trend and avoid also abusing other men. We should eradicate all sexual sins. Still do not focus solely on sexual wrongs of the magisterium, attend to slavery of domestic workers, death penalty, femicide, and many other social ills. It is not easy on teachers these days, school kids have joined gangs, attack each other and their teachers. Like Jesus we can conscientise society and empower it in dealing with these.

"Neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more". Overcome desire for revenge when wronged. Jesus calls for rehabilitation rather than revenge. We are people of almsgiving, people of love not people of retribution and retaliation. We seek repentance and renewal not annihilation of sinners - rather annihilate sin. Divine mercy is greater law versus Capital punishment, versus Euthanasia. This is the language of Catholic theology. Jesus commands the woman to let go of the past. We too should let go of the hurts inflicted in the past, stop opening our old wounds, cut the vicious circle of revenge. We should deal with our desires for vengeance, our desires to moralise, our zealousness to control others, stop being punishers and dealers of retribution. Carrying stones to inflict pain will not change the world. In sotho we say: *"Ha ditelu tsa monna e mong dica o tshela tsa hau ka metsi"* simply implying that we should not enjoy the misfortune of others. Rather let us become instruments of peace, be a face of a forgiving God who forgets the past and assures a brighter future. You look at some face and you see bitterness and you pity the companions of such a person. Learn to smile my friends, you may recuperate your beauty. A smiling heart is a health remedy, a forgiving heart is a cure to premature aging. I am willing to let go of my pain, let go of my sins, drop my stones and start afresh. I am willing to help a struggling brother to be a better person. Praying and hoping you will join me and adopt a healthy lifestyle. Thank you and God bless.