

A Short Teaching on Oils Verses Stones  
by Deacon Gerry Palermo

Greetings on the Fifth Sunday of Lent

Readings: IS 43:16-21; PS 126:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 6; PHIL 3:8-14; JN 8:1-11

The Gospel reading today is one of a kind. It belongs in the Gospel of Luke more than the Gospel of John in writing style/message type. It is canonical and has this special character.

The opening is an observation. The people returned to their homes and Jesus returned to the Mount of Olives, an olive grove, and also a water permeable chalk and flint hill that filters rain water and feeds the aquifers of Jerusalem. From here Jesus brings the healing of Mercy. Since antiquity oils are associated with anointing, healing, temple sacrifice and priestly ordination. Today we use sacred oils in Baptism, Confirmation, Ordination and Anointing of the Sick. It is that backdrop of olive oil and spiritual healing, Jesus enters the temple.

The scribes and Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery and made her stand in the middle. She did what most all of us do, one way or another, grab love. Seize, take, master, consume and be consumed. None of those work. Only patient acceptance of a gift freely given is the way to have love in your life. The scribes and Pharisees knew that too and wanted to remove the error by stoning her. They also wanted Jesus to support their juridic assessment. Jesus instead wants to remind them of something.

Response One: Jesus writes in the ground. So much has been written with lots of good ideas. I will answer: Jesus was drawing like a child in the sand. Do you remember your innocence? When you could write in the dirt and be content?

The woman understood. She watched him and she remembered. She remembered the time in her life when she was innocent for love. In the presence of Jesus she felt safe to remember and desire her restoration. She stayed. She stayed and her error was transformed from sin to wisdom. The scribes and Pharisees did not understand. So they asked again.

Response Two: 'Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her'. Jesus writes in the ground. This time they understood. They watched him and they remembered. They remembered the time in their life when they were innocent for love. And then they remembered when that was no longer true. In the presence of Jesus they felt shame and did not allow mercy to penetrate them. They did not remember for restoration, they remembered for condemnation. They left. They left and never heard the words that were meant for the woman and for them. Has no one condemned you? ... Neither do I... go and sin no more.

It is best to see this story as a call to remember you once were innocent and can be innocent again. Go, and use this new wisdom to avoid sin again. Be restored this Easter!

Peace be with you.

Deacon Gerry