

A community that mends

Homily for April 2nd and 3rd
2022

In the past week, Pope Francis has spoken words that have captivated many. On March 25th, the Feast of the Annunciation, when he consecrated Ukraine and Russia to the Immaculate Heart of Mary he said in his homily:

We ask the Lord for many things, but how often we forget to ask him for what is most important and what he desires most to give us: the Holy Spirit, the power to love. Indeed, without love, what can we offer to the world? It has been said that a Christian without love is like a needle that does not sew: it stings, it wounds, and if it fails to sew, weave or patch, then it is useless.¹

Then on Friday April 1st when meeting with First Nations, Metis and Inuit delegations to conclude their week of conversations the Holy Father spoke words of healing that the original inhabitants of these lands heard with gratitude:

I feel sorrow and shame - for the role that a number of Catholics, particularly those with educational responsibilities, have had in all these things that wounded you, in the abuses you suffered and in the lack of respect shown for your identity, your culture and even your spiritual values. All these things are contrary to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For the deplorable conduct of those members of the Catholic Church, I ask for God's forgiveness and I want to say to you with all my heart: I am very sorry. And I join my brothers, the Canadian bishops, in asking your pardon.

These words are I believe expressions of what the Lord is wanting to do in the Church in our time. We are to be the community that loves in such a way that the needle of grace is to be mending lives, not tearing them apart. We are to be the community that shows to the first peoples of these lands that we are standing and journeying together.

To be a community that mends as we journey together has always been the way of Jesus. Think of today's Gospel reading. It is a striking passage of a power differential between the religious leaders, and a woman, who has been caught in the act of adultery. Now think about this for a minute. These men would had in some premeditated way been following this woman in order to catch her in the act. There is no love in their hearts, no thread in the needle that wants to bring healing into her life. Their actions sting and wound for their intent is to use her as a prop to get at Jesus.

What do I mean by this? The leaders think they have got Jesus between a rock and a hard place. If he lets her go, he will be ignoring the Law of Moses and violating the commandment that states the penalty for adultery is stoning to death. On the other hand, within the legal system of

¹ <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/250800/full-text-pope-francis-homily-at-the-penance-service-and-act-of-consecration-to-the-immaculate-heart>

Roman justice, the only people who could enact capital punishment were the Romans. Therefore if Jesus gave his consent to her stoning he would be violating Roman law and could be arrested.

But notice what Jesus does:

Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground.²

Now what was he writing on the ground? Many biblical scholars believe he wrote a passage from Jeremiah 17, verses 1 and 13. Verse 1 reads:

The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron; with a point of diamond it is engraved on the tablet of their heart,³

Verse 13 reads:

***O LORD, the hope of Israel,
all who forsake you shall be put to shame;
those who turn away from you shall be written in the earth,
for they have forsaken the LORD, the fountain of living water.⁴***

Now notice what Jesus is doing. By writing this verse on the ground and then by stating the religious leaders:

Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.⁵

he is implicating them. Not only does he want them to see themselves in these verses he also wants them to see that their treatment of this woman shows that they have forsaken the Lord, the fountain of living water. This living water reference becomes even more significant when seen in relation to something Jesus says in John 7 at verses 37 and 38:

Let anyone who is thirsty come to me,³⁸ and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.’⁶

What a contrast between the ministry of the religious leaders and that of Jesus. In light of what has occurred in these days in Rome, when we think of the pain resulting from the sex abuse scandals in the Church that have wounded so many, Jesus is indeed writing in the ground and calling the Church, especially those of us who are her leaders to ponder deeply ways in which

² [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*](#) (Jn 8:6). (1989). Thomas Nelson Publishers.

³ [*The Holy Bible*](#) (Revised Standard Version; Second Catholic Edition, Je 17:1). (2006). Ignatius Press.

⁴ [*The Holy Bible*](#) (Revised Standard Version; Second Catholic Edition, Je 17:13). (2006). Ignatius Press.

⁵ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*](#) (Jn 8:7). (1989). Thomas Nelson Publishers.

⁶ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*](#) (Jn 7:37–38). (1989). Thomas Nelson Publishers.

some have treated the vulnerable like the way the Pharisees were treating this woman and treating Jesus.

Again I would like to quote Pope Francis from Friday:

Clearly, the content of the faith cannot be transmitted in a way contrary to the faith itself: Jesus taught us to welcome, love, serve and not judge; it is a frightening thing when, precisely in the name of the faith, counter-witness is rendered to the Gospel.

With all of this said I want to conclude by saying I believe we have an opportunity that is filled with hope so that we can be true witnesses to the Gospel. It is the hope that the Lord lays out for us to become the Church that more fully embodies the gracious humility and love of Jesus. It is to be the Church that helps people to know they are not condemned but forgiven and supported to grow in holiness as Jesus does with this woman when he states:

Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again.

It is to be the Church Pope Francis described on March 25th with these words:

We need the wisdom and gentle power of God that is the Holy Spirit. We need the Spirit of love who dispels hatred, soothes bitterness, extinguishes greed and rouses us from indifference. We need God's love, for our love is fragile and insufficient.

May we be inspired by what we have considered today so that St. Peter's becomes increasingly a community that mends not only relationships with First Nations but that here all may experience a place where the living waters of grace bring refreshment and healing. That all of us may admit that I am not without sin and because of this we are all in need of hearing Jesus say to us:

Neither do I condemn you; go and do not sin again.