

Praying the Scripture - a few simple steps at home

Sunday 3rd April 2022

Start with stillness and quietening down; then gently read the passage, noticing any feelings and connections to your own experience.

1. Read the passage again and spend understand. *The notes in your Bible may be of help at this point.*
2. Read the passage a third time - wondering how you yourself might pray the text over the next few days.
3. Over the next week, set aside times to come back more than once to the passage. You could read it all or part of it again, slowly. Perhaps there is a special word for you in this passage of Scripture? Keep this word or phrase in your thoughts and gently repeat it, bringing it to mind and allowing God to speak to you in your heart.
4. Finally, come back to the text to conclude: What is God in this scripture asking of you this week? What is the one challenge, one little change you are asked to make or the thing you have been asked to do? Then say a prayer of thanksgiving for the good news in the passage. End in quiet prayer.



THIS SUNDAY'S GOSPEL – John 8:1-11

Neither do I condemn you... from now on do not sin again

Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, they said to him, 'Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?' They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, 'Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.' And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus straightened up and said to her, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' She said, 'No one, sir.' And Jesus said, 'Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.'



A Short Thought

Jesus may not have had a chalkboard, but he had the dirt from which we were formed and His finger as chalk. And, He had a lesson to teach. For a moment, let's place ourselves in this scene, but not as the Pharisee, Jesus, or the woman caught in adultery. No, I want us to put ourselves in the crowd. A woman has been cast into the centre of the town square – vulnerable, probably barely clothed, petrified, and ashamed. We don't know who the man is or if they claimed to be in love, or if either one of them was married to others. We just know that their sin, inflicted primarily on her, has been exposed. She is exposed in a way she never imagined she would be. And we witness this scene like we view a car crash on the side of the motorway. How many times are we that crowd? We hear rumours about the about people. About parents, neighbours, young people and their marital, health or addiction problems, about teens' reputations at school, or about parties they attend and participate in on the weekends? People's lives are often exposed to us without their knowledge. Other times they may come to us to talk and seek advice, anxious we will judge them for the choices they have made, or even worse, in some way, let us down... disappoint us.

I've encountered fearful people, hesitant to tell others they have difficulties or are facing problems; young people who shake in fear as they struggle to talk to anyone about sexual orientation and confused as to how they can overcome their pornography, drug, alcohol, or gambling addiction. Inside, they have already cast the first stone... at themselves. So, you hear rumours, allegations or people come to you, do they experience compassion as this woman experienced Christ? Do they feel loved unconditionally? Is it our job to hold them accountable? Is our first reaction one of judgement or disgust? Do we try to 'fix' them? Or do they experience Christ in you even when the discussion is difficult? Do they understand through your loving words and actions the mercy of God? Do they know you will protect them when others speak poorly of them, praise them for their honesty and desire to reconcile, and pray with them in the midst of their struggle? When a person leaves your company, do they walk away feeling as if no one condemned them? "No one, sir." (John 8:11) This Scripture should be on every church door in the world. No condemnation here! All are welcome! We must be a Church open to receiving everyone. We are a church of sinners seeking the mercy of God... And we sinners are called to let

ourselves be transformed, renewed, sanctified by God." 'Being with' Christ does not mean isolating ourselves from others. Rather, it is a 'being with' in order to go forth and encounter others." (Pope Francis) When mercy & forgiveness is received, we can freely give it to others.

SOME POINTERS FOR PRAYER

- Who are you in this story? Try to put yourself in the woman's place: What were her feelings at that moment?
- Compassion for human frailty combined with a gentle challenge to a better life marked the response of Jesus. From whom have you experienced a compassionate challenge? What was that like for you? To whom have you given such a challenge?
- If Jesus were to write a quiet message on the ground for you, what would it be?
- Jesus is the one who never condemns, even when we are most condemnatory of ourselves. Hear in your heart the words spoken to each of us - 'I do not condemn you.'
- The Pharisees and scribes self-righteously condemned the woman until Jesus brought them in touch with their own sinfulness. This was a conversion moment for them and they turned away from their quest for the death of the woman. Have there been times when your awareness of your own fragility and sinfulness has helped you to be less judgemental of others?
- Have you experienced being challenged for doing something wrong by someone who loves you or by someone who is hostile to you. What has been the difference? To be forgiven and be forgiven is a wonderful healing.
- Who is excluded in your community? What steps can and should be taken to accept those excluded?

Prayer

God of power, God of mercy, you bring forth springs in the wasteland and turn despair into hope. Look not upon the sins of our past, but lift from our hearts the failures that weigh us down, that we may find refreshment and life in Christ, our liberator from sin. We ask this, as always, through Jesus Christ your son, Amen



Prayer in these uncertain times

We pray for all those in our country and throughout the world suffering from the Corona Virus. May its victims and their families be strengthened by the support of our community of faith and restored soon to full health. We also pray for our leaders and medical personnel who deal with the virus. May we keep calm and may we join together in solidarity with care and compassion to tackle this emergency. This we ask in confidence through Christ Our Lord. Amen

We pray for Ukraine. For all of humanity distorted by war. For all the lives lost, homes seized, and peace broken. May the Spirit of comfort and compassion envelop all who dwell in fear. May peace prevail and justice reign. May love always be the guide and measure of our actions and responses. Amen

