



My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Lent is a time to look at our lives, to see how we need to change our lives and receive God's mercy and healing. This weekend's Gospel highlights this. When we look at this story of the woman caught in the very act of adultery, we see our story laid out before us. Much like last week's Gospel (with the Prodigal Son parable), we find ourselves in each of the supporting characters.

When we look at the woman caught in adultery, don't we see ourselves? There we see this woman caught in her shame, exposed before everyone. We see this deep fear within each of us: that our sins will be found out, exposed to everyone, and we will be condemned. Isn't this why we're constantly wearing "masks" – not masks over our faces, but masks over our being. We can be so afraid of being condemned that we refuse to show our true selves. Will I no longer be liked? Will I be rejected? The problem

with these masks, of course, is that when we don't show our true selves, we're always surrounded by the nagging thought that those around me like my "persona" – my mask – not who I really am. And we are left still empty and separated from everyone else in our existential loneliness. We even can't abide to look at ourselves. We, too often, see such hideousness in our shame that we don't want to look at it, lest we fall into the darkness of depression and self-condemnation.

On the other side, we see the Pharisees bringing this woman to Jesus. Here, we see that they have caught, shamed and condemned this woman – and that's what they are planning on doing with Jesus as well. They do not want to look at their own sins, and find it so much easier to condemn others. It's almost as if their insecurity requires them to condemn the other who questions their status quo. This is so easy to do in our virtual reality. Trolling and cyber-bullying are now part of the norm. We see the "other" as either a block or a stepping stone to our own success.

For both the woman and the Pharisees, Jesus works in mercy and love. To the Pharisees, He invites them to look into their own lives, seeing their own sins, the ways they have rejected God's law, and repent of their self-righteous condemnation of the other. To the woman who is caught in her shame, Jesus identifies Himself with her, not fearing her "messiness," and says, **"Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin any more"** (John 8:11). To each of us, Jesus says, "Do not be afraid to look at your sinfulness. Your fear is manipulating you, causing you to wear masks, luring you to strike out in condemnation so that your sins won't look so bad or will at least remain hidden. Do not be afraid. I will not leave you. I do not condemn you. I have united Myself to you. Go and sin no more."

May we receive the merciful love of Jesus, knowing that no matter how dark our past may be, no matter how wretched our sins, He pours His loving mercy upon us. And in receiving that mercy, may we reach out in mercy to those around us.