



Fifth Week of Lent: 3rd/4th April 2022

Reflection / Homily – Mgr Daniel McHugh

“Deliver us O Lord from our bondage.”

Most people will have noticed that the Oscars took place this past week; the event achieved notoriety because of the action of Will Smith, a very well-known actor, who went on stage to slap Chris Rock, a comedian and presenter at the event, who made disparaging remarks about Smith’s wife Jada Pickett-Smith who suffers from alopecia, a hair loss condition.

The repercussions from this continue, and it is being said that Smith may be expelled from the Academy. Now, many people would sympathise with Will Smith: to have to take insulting remarks in the context of humour about someone who matters to you is not easy to take.

It was interesting, however, to note the opinion of Denzel Washington, an even more famous veteran actor and producer, to took time to advise and calm Smith after the incident. He said to him, “At your highest moment be careful, that’s when the devil comes for you.” Smith had first received a Best Actor award for his role in King Richard, and here he was publicly assaulting another person. What would his young admirers make of it? As we witnessed Smith in tears afterwards we were all conscious of the vulnerability and weakness of great Hollywood stars like the rest of us. We too have to be vigilant: we shouldn’t assume we have everything under control, but make sure that in our own circles of influence we are acting as Christ would have us act.

The Gospel for the 5th Sunday of Lent recounts a very well-known incident in the ministry of Jesus: it continues to offer lessons about God’s mercy and forgiveness. Last Sunday we heard in the Parable of the Prodigal Son from the Gospel of Luke. This Sunday we hear not a Parable, but the report from John’s Gospel of an encounter between Jesus, the scribes and the Pharisees, and a woman caught in adultery.

In the Pharisees state clearly that according to the Law of Moses, those caught in the act of adultery were to be stoned to death. As the Gospel reading shows they were trying to trap Jesus: there was more to the question, particularly in relation to both the Law of Moses, and the law under Roman occupation where Jewish people did not have authority to execute people. This issue comes up in the Passion readings in Holy Week where the Jews call for the death of Jesus rather than Barabbas; it is clear they call on the Romans to execute Him.

What is most significant for us this week and our following of Jesus, is the answer He gives or rather the question He asks. After writing on the ground with His finger (now we would like to know what He wrote!) He addresses those who stand before Him and suggests that the one without sin cast the first stone. We can easily imagine the scene as

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Co-ordinator for Ethnic Chaplaincies in the Archdiocese



the Pharisees and elders disperse, one by one. Left alone with the woman, Jesus asks where her accusers have gone. With no one remaining to condemn the woman, Jesus (the only one who is truly without sin) sends the woman on her way, refusing to pass judgement on her, but exhorting her to avoid future sin.

Jesus' response to those who accuse the woman is more than a caution to us about making judgement of others. As sinners, we are not worthy to judge the sins of others and we should stand convicted by God of our own transgressions. Yet, Jesus, the one without sin, offers us who are sinners, His mercy and forgiveness. Redeemed by Jesus' compassion we are sent to sin no more and to live in God's love and peace.

I chose the words from the Psalm for the 5th Sunday as focus for my prayer during the 5th Week of Lent: "Deliver us O Lord from our bondage". Whether it is in our readiness to judge others, or in our attachment to sin we do not wish to break from, we need the Grace of God to repent this Holy Passiontide.

Pope Francis reminds us we have a Mother to keep us safe. He wrote "The Russian mystics of the early centuries of the Church counseled their disciples, the young monks, to take refuge **under the mantle of the Holy mother of God** during time of spiritual turmoil." He said, "**The devil cannot enter there because she is mother, and as a mother she defends.**"

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