



5th Sunday of Lent



Date: Sunday, April 6, 2025 | **Season:** Lent | **Year:** C

First Reading: Isaiah 43:16–21

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 126:1–6 | **Response:** Psalm 126:3

Second Reading: Philippians 3:8–14

Gospel Acclamation: Joel 2:12–13

Gospel Reading: John 8:1–11

Preached at: the Chapel of the Most Holy Name, Kolvenbach House in the Archdiocese of Lusaka, Zambia.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

The Word of God today is a summons.

A summons to leave behind what binds us—and to step forward into the freedom of God’s mercy.

“Do not remember the former things,” says the Lord through the prophet Isaiah, “nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am about to do a new thing.”

This is not a call to forget the past as if it never mattered.

It is a call to let God do what only God can do—redeem it.

Isaiah spoke to a people in exile. People who had lost their homeland, their certainty, their dignity. And yet God, through the prophet, dares to proclaim that something new is beginning. That the God who once split the sea will now make a path in the wilderness. That the tears of the displaced will become songs of joy.

And that same hope, that same daring, burns in today’s Gospel.

A woman is dragged before Jesus.

She does not walk. She is not invited.

She is *dragged*—as an object lesson, as a legal trap, as a disposable person.

Caught, they say, in the very act of adultery.

But where is the man?

The Law of Moses is clear: *“Both the adulterer and the adulteress shall be put to death.”*

But somehow, only one party appears in court that day.

Only one body is exposed.

Only one face is shamed.

And that silence—the silence around the missing man—speaks volumes.

It reveals not justice, but a performance.

Not holiness, but hypocrisy.

Not a desire to uphold the law, but to weaponise it for control.

And let us not forget, this woman lived in a culture where a man could initiate adultery and walk away unmarked, while a woman bore all the blame. She may have been coerced. She may have been abandoned. She may have been seeking safety, affection, survival. We do not know the full story. But Jesus did.

And he did not turn away.

He bent down. He placed himself below her accusers. And he wrote in the dirt.

And then he stood, and said:

“Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to cast a stone.”

He does not erase the law. He fulfills it—not with vengeance, but with truth.

Because real justice does not throw stones from a distance.

Real justice stoops low, looks into the eyes of the wounded, and says:

“You are not your worst mistake.”

And in that moment, the crowd disperses.

From the eldest to the youngest, their stones fall silent.

And then Jesus speaks to the woman—directly, personally, tenderly:

“Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on, do not sin again.”

She is not excused. She is transformed.

She is not condemned. She is commissioned.

She walks away not just forgiven—but restored.

My friends, this Gospel is not only about a woman two thousand years ago.
It is about every person who has ever been reduced to a label.
Every person whose story has been edited for someone else's agenda.
Every person who has been humiliated by a system that protects the powerful
and punishes the weak.

And yes, it speaks to us—in Zambia, in 2025.

Because we, too, live in a world of one-sided justice.
Where those with influence can disappear from judgment, while others are pa-
raded as examples.
Where young women carry the shame of situations they did not choose.
Where poverty is treated as a moral failure, and wealth as a sign of virtue.
Where the addict is blamed but not helped.
Where the migrant is rejected but never asked their story.
Where the unemployed father is dismissed, the pregnant teenager whispered
about,
the HIV-positive neighbour left alone,
and the LGBT youth condemned rather than listened to.

And sometimes—even painfully—we must admit: the Church itself has been
slow to learn,
slow to listen,
slow to become the synodal Church Pope Francis is calling us to be—
a Church that walks with, not ahead of, God's people.
A Church that asks more often, "Whom have we left behind?"
and dares to answer honestly.

And Pope Francis puts it plainly. He says:
"At times we cast harsh words and hurl resentment like stones at others... Yet
Christ wants to break down the walls of past resentment and the barriers of sin."

Sometimes the stones we throw are not visible.
We throw them in gossip.
We throw them in silence.
We throw them in policies that protect privilege and leave others behind.
And often, we hurl our unresolved shame—our secret regrets—onto someone
else.

It is easier to accuse than to convert.

Easier to condemn than to confess.

Easier to hide our wounds by exposing the wounds of others.

But the voice of Jesus still speaks:

“Let the one without sin cast the first stone.”

So what must we do?

Saint Paul gives us the answer. In the Letter to the Philippians, he says:

“For the sake of Christ, I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.”

He has left behind the illusion of righteousness.

He has let go of pedigree, privilege, and pride.

And he stretches forward—toward the mercy that saves.

So must we.

This week, let me invite you to three concrete steps—an Ignatian path of conversion:

First:

Reflect on the stones you still hold.

Who have you silently judged?

Whose name do you speak with contempt?

Let the Holy Spirit show you the face behind your resentment.

Pray for them. Ask for the grace to release them—and yourself—from judgment.

Second:

Identify the “former things” that keep you stuck.

What failure in your past still defines you?

What shame still clings to your soul?

Bring it to the Lord—in the sacrament of Reconciliation.

Let Christ stoop down into the dust of your life and write something new.

Third:

Restore someone’s dignity.

Do not just walk past the outcast. Walk with them.

Send a message to someone you know who feels excluded.

Speak a word of hope to someone who has been condemned.
Refuse the easy cruelty of social media. Choose the harder grace of accompaniment.

Because, my friends, we are not here to defend a perfect Church.
We are here to become a merciful Church.
And mercy, real mercy, costs something.
It costs us our pride.
It costs us our certainty.
It costs us our stones.

But it gives us everything.
Because in mercy, we meet Christ.
In mercy, we become who we were made to be.
And in mercy, we discover the power of God's new thing—not just in ancient stories, but in the lives we are living right now.

So, if you think your past defines you—it doesn't.
If you fear that mercy is not meant for you—it is.
And if you wonder whether new life is possible—it is, and it begins today.

May the grace of this season, through the mercy of Christ, lead us all to a newness of life that surpasses all we have known before.
And may we become instruments of God's mercy in a world desperate for hope.

Amen.

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