

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. In what ways are we already living out the vision of Pope Francis to be an open door community?
2. The Eucharist is “not the prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak.” What are the implications of this for our parish community?
3. The Pope quotes St Francis de Sales saying: “A spoonful of honey attracts more flies than a barrelful of vinegar.” How can we put this into practice as a Church, as a parish and as individuals?
4. Pope Francis says “the church must be a place of mercy freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel.” [EG 114] How can our parishes be open and merciful?

Practical evangelisation

At the end of the Gospel Jesus was left with the woman: he didn't condemn her but encouraged her to change her life.

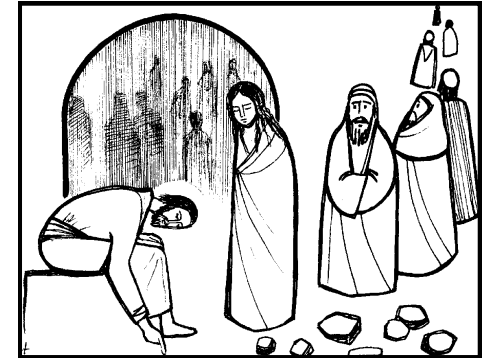
Can you find an opportunity to have a conversation with someone about the Jesus who doesn't condemn people? Can you make someone feel welcome and enable them to recognise that they are not condemned and that they are loved by God and by our church community?

Prayer

Mary, Virgin of listening and contemplation,
Mother of love,
Bride of the eternal wedding feast,
pray for the Church, whose pure icon you are,
that she may never be closed in on herself
or lose her passion for establishing God's kingdom.
Star of the new evangelisation,
help us to bear radiant witness to communion,
service, ardent and generous faith,
justice and love of the poor, that the joy of the Gospel
may reach to the ends of the earth.
Mother of the living Gospel, pray for us. Amen.



*Together
on the
Road
Lent 2019*



Fifth Sunday of Lent: The Woman taken in Adultery

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. At daybreak he appeared in the Temple again; and as all the people came to him, he sat down and began to teach them.

The scribes and Pharisees brought a woman along who had been caught committing adultery; and making her stand there in full view of everybody, they said to Jesus, 'Master, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery, and Moses has ordered us in the Law to condemn women like this to death by stoning. What have you to say?' They asked him this as a test, looking for something to use against him. But Jesus bent down and started writing on the ground with his finger. As they persisted with their question, he looked up and said, 'If there is one of you who has not sinned, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.' Then he bent down and wrote on the ground again. When they heard this they went away one by one, beginning with the eldest, until Jesus was left alone with the woman, who remained standing there. He looked up and said, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' 'No one, sir' she replied. 'Neither do I condemn you,' said Jesus 'go away, and do not sin any more.'

John 8:1-11

Jesus confronts the crowd who want to follow the law and to condemn this woman, seen by many as a “bad” person. He refuses to condemn her and challenges them to reflect on their own lives.

Pope Francis asks us to reflect on how our parish communities are called to be places of welcome and inclusion so that people can experience the joy of the Gospel in their lives and respond appropriately.

These Lenten Reflections can be downloaded from
www.synod2020.co.uk



To ponder: There are often laws and rituals that we follow. In this case Jesus was willing to put the laws to one side, to consider the particular circumstances of the woman and to challenge others to reflect on their lives.

Pope Francis reflects:

A Church which “goes forth” is a Church whose doors are open. Going out to others in order to reach the fringes of humanity does not mean rushing out aimlessly into the world. Often it is

better simply to slow down, to put aside our eagerness in order to see and listen to others, to stop rushing from one thing to another and to remain with someone who has faltered along the way. [46]

Question: How can we be open to the circumstances of people that we meet and as Pope Francis suggests remain with people and share our stories?

To ponder: In the Gospel passage the woman discovers that she is loved and so she is able to respond. The Pope puts this invitation (to know we are loved) and our response at the heart of the mission of the Church.

Pope Francis reflects:

Before all else, the Gospel invites us to respond to the God of love who saves us, to see God in others and to go forth from ourselves to seek the good of others. Under no circumstance can this invitation be obscured! All of the virtues are at the service of this response of love. If this invitation does not radiate forcefully and attractively, the edifice of the Church’s moral teaching risks becoming a house of cards, and this is our greatest risk. It would mean that it is not the Gospel which is being preached, but certain doctrinal or moral points based on specific ideological options. The message will run the risk of losing its freshness and will cease to have “the fragrance of the Gospel”. [39]

Question: How can we attract others towards the “fragrance of the Gospel” whilst being faithful to the moral teachings of the Church?

To ponder: This woman caught in adultery was seen by many as an “outsider”, but to God no one is excluded.

Pope Francis reflects:

The Church is called to be the house of the Father, with doors always wide open. One concrete sign of such openness is that our church doors should always be open, so that if someone, moved by the Spirit, comes there looking for God, he or she will not find a closed door. There are other doors that should not be closed either. Everyone can share in some way in the life of the Church; everyone can be part of the community, nor should the doors of the sacraments be closed for simply any reason. This is especially true of the sacrament which is itself “the door”: baptism. The Eucharist, although it is the fullness of sacramental life, is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak. These convictions have pastoral consequences that we are called to consider with prudence and boldness. Frequently, we act as arbiters of grace rather than its facilitators. But the Church is not a tollhouse; it is the house of the Father, where there is a place for everyone, with all their problems. [47]

Question: This challenges us to reflect on our pastoral practice: how can we live out what the Pope is suggesting? What are the “pastoral consequences”? Can we leave open the door of our Church?

To ponder: The way we picture the Church influences our thought and actions. Pope Francis invites us to consider a new model, which we find in the story of the woman caught in adultery.

Pope Francis reflects:

The thing the church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. I see the church as a field hospital after battle. It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars! You have to heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else. Heal the wounds, heal the wounds. ... and you have to start from the ground up. [America magazine – September 2013]

Question: What are the obvious wounds of those around us, what are the hidden wounds? How can we help to heal those wounds?