

**ENTRANCE ANTIPHON** (or a hymn) Give me justice, O God, and plead my cause against a nation that is faithless. From the deceitful and cunning rescue me, for you, O God, are my strength.

**RESPONSORIAL PSALM** (Ps 125)

**ANTIPHON:** The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.

**RESPONSE:** **The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.**

**LECTOR:** When the Lord delivered Zion from bondage, it seemed like a dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, on our lips there were songs. **R.**

**LECTOR:** The heathens themselves said: "What marvels the Lord worked for them!" What marvels the Lord worked for us! Indeed we were glad. **R.**

**LECTOR:** Deliver us, O Lord, from our bondage as streams in dry land. Those who are sowing in tears will sing when they reap. **R.**

**LECTOR:** They go out, they go out, full of tears, carrying seed for the sowing: they come back, they come back, full of song, carrying their sheaves. **R.**

**GOSPEL ACCLAMATION** Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ, king of endless glory! With all your heart turn to me, For I am tender and compassionate. Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ, king of endless glory!

**COMMUNION ANTIPHON** (or a hymn) Has no one condemned you, woman? No one, Lord. Neither shall I condemn you. From now on, sin no more.

**TODAY'S READINGS** Isaiah 43:16-21; Philippians 3:8-14; John 8:1-11

**NEXT WEEK** (Palm Sunday, Year C) Isaiah 50:4-7; Ps 21; Philippians 2:6-11; Luke 22:14 – 23:56

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## Mercy and compassion above all



**3 April 2022 5th Sunday Lent Year C**

If you were asked to name ten famous figures in the Bible, you would probably list a series of well-known male identities, for example, Abraham, Moses, Job, Jesus, Peter, or Paul. Of the 1426 names mentioned in the Bible, 1315 are male. Only 111 women's names appear in the Sacred Scriptures. Given these statistics, one might rightly assume that both women and the issues specific to women were largely ignored by the Biblical writers.

Today's gospel, however, presents us with an anomaly – a nameless, adulterous woman whose story proved so powerful that it survived three centuries to be later included in the Fourth Gospel. Even more remarkable is that it involved a woman who was far from exemplary in her behaviour. Women play an important role in the Fourth Gospel. Jesus' mother is offered as an example of the perfect disciple (Jn 2:3-4); the woman at the well in Samaria (Jn 4) is presented as a prototype of the Christian missionary (Jn 4:4-42); and, the first witness of the resurrection is Mary Magdalene (Jn 20:11-18), a detail that grants apostolic status to a woman.

The story of the woman condemned by a mob for her extramarital affairs is very different. On the one hand, it appears to be a stray tradition about Jesus that was added to the Gospel in the third century. On the other, the subject of the story is not held up as an example of anything other than as a recipient of Jesus' mercy and compassion.

Some early manuscripts have this story in Luke's Gospel; and, it is a worthy sequel to last week's story of the Prodigal Son (Lk 15:11-32). Just as the Lukan Jesus told that story of the shameless father who sought to reconcile his two sons, so too here this tale serves to highlight that the call to be a Christian is a call to be different, even shameful in the eyes of wider society.

Jesus wouldn't conform to the mob mentality. He saw through the hypocrisy of the crowd demanding the woman's death. He knew that their appeal to the authorities, both religious and civil, was an attempt to hide from the real demands of God's covenantal love.

In a society that saw women as property, Jesus held to a broader, more equalitarian perspective, despite the risk of being seen as different and dangerous. For Jesus, mercy and compassion trump all other demands, even the legal customs of society. He chose to identify with someone shamed by wider society and condemned by the mob.

Like the dysfunctional family of last week's gospel, the story of the adulterous woman suggests that Christians too must be shameless in their compassion for the poor and lowly. To publicly declare one's allegiance to the crucified Christ is to identify oneself with all those marginalised by the cultural expectations of society – be they refugees, drug addicts, adulterers or criminals.

**Ian J Elmer**

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