**5th Sunday in Lent – Cycle C: John 8: 1-11**

**Biblical Reflection**: There are several intersections to which the Old Testament that our Lord leads us. The Pharisees attempt to trap Jesus by either getting Him to condemn the adulterous women (reserved only for the Romans- John 18:31) or getting Him to reject Moses’ teaching (discrediting himself as the Messiah) (Lev. 20:10, Duet. 22:22). Reading in context, but less spoken of, is the action of Jesus writing in the earth (Jer 17:13) and “living water” bent down before sinners (all).

Most of John 7, (just before the gospel) takes place during the Feast of Booths (or Tabernacles)—Jewish feast of thanksgiving (*todah* in Hebrew) to God for the many blessings (harvest) and taking care of them as they sojourned the wilderness after the God saved them from bondage—Jesus ends the feast with Jn 7:38, “He who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, “Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.” The next morning, we get the gospel reading of the adulterous woman. Jesus, the living water, bends down before those who sought to entrap him and writes in the earth, as foretold in Jer 17:13, “… those who turn away from you shall be written in the earth, for they have forsaken the Lord, the fountain of living water.” And He, the found of the living water, again bends down before the adulterous women, writing in the earth with his finger, not condemning her but extending mercy with a warning to, “sin no more,” encouraging a return to virtue.

St. Francis de Sales tells us to, “Look at your faults, like those of others, with compassion rather that with indignation, more with humility and than [sic?] severity.” The author quotes our saint further, “When we cannot excuse sin, let us at least make it worthy of compassion by attributing the most favorable cause we can, such as ignorance or weakness.”

* Jesus, being God, is not going to be entrapped by the elders or Pharisees; he offers a path that neither condemns the women nor rejects Moses’ teaching while flipping the script onto those who would entrap him. Jesus guides us to not embrace the world but to reform our ways with patience and humility—those guilty and those who would accuse. Do you feel entrapped with seemingly paradoxical choices that would result in the world rejecting you or a faith that would reject you? When you leave work or school to observe, Holy Week, Holy Thursday, or Good Friday? How can you flip the script with those who would accuse you of assuming authority you don’t have?

* The Festival of Booths (Tabernacles) is a week-long celebration of humble thanksgiving to God where they build temporary shelters, made of tree branches (huts or booths) trusting in God’s faithfulness to provide in austerity. Jesus, the living water, is offering to provide far more than physical shelter and food (harvest), but complete provisioning of our bodies and souls for the journey to heaven. During Lent, have you built a “booth” – a temporary and uncomfortable place – to give thanksgiving to God, for 40 days? How about 7 days?
* Do you think that Lent should be a time of thanksgiving (*todah*) for temporal and spiritual provisions given to us by God for your journey towards heaven? If so, how have you shown it? What is your booth of discomfort for communal Love of God made of? Good works? More prayer?
* Do you believe that Jesus’, The Word Incarnate, is the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets? What does your answer tell you about your willful obedience and your Love of God in *todah* and good works?
* Jesus, the life giving fountain, bends, in humility, and writes in the earth (witnessing to their guilt) before the elders and Pharisees would accuse the apparently guilty woman. Notice he stands (in righteousness) before telling them, “Let him who is without sin among you cast the first stone.” Reflecting on their rush to judgement and their own guilt they walk away, shameful. Jesus, the living water, bends (humility) and writes again in the earth before the woman (witnessing to her sinfulness). Yet our Lord grants mercy with patience and encourages her “to sin no more.” How quick are we to condemn ourselves? What does St. Francis de Sales tell us about that?
* Can you witness to (“write in the earth”) your sins while still following our Lord’s example of mercy and patience and movement towards virtue, and allow the fountain of life giving waters to flow through you? Can you do this with others? Are you more inclined to act the same or differently in matters of your sins and those of others? Explain and seek to understand why that is the case.
* In John 7:23, “If on the Sabbath a man receives circumcision, so that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because on the Sabbath I made a man’s whole body well?” Jesus, (during the Festival of Booths) teaches he followed the Law of Moses in the Sacrament of Healing the blind-man, doing good, saving life and bring glory to God (CCC2173). Is this how you understand the Sabbath? If not, what would what need to change to align with that teaching?

**Tuesday in the Fourth Week of Lent: John 5:1-16**

**Catechetical Reflection**: Our gospel reading illuminates healing from the pool of Bethesda – or “House of Mercy”. Ironically merciful healing to the 38yr old paralytic man on the Sabbath is a source of persecution, turned into a teaching of complete healing (not just physical healing) through Grace—not the water itself—offered to his accusers and all who believe in his salvific love. This is important to our proper understanding of sacramentals (blessings, holy water, chrism oil, medals, and others forms of popular piety) which prepare us to receive all sacraments (CCC1670) to include that of healing (Penance and Anointing of the Sick) and true healing (CCC 1421). Jesus asks the lame man if he wants “to be healed?” [RSV-SCE], “to be well?” [NAB], “thou be made whole?”[Douay-Rheims]. It is also telling that through the instrument of holy water, as in our baptism, we are prepared to be healed of original sin though his Grace.

Our saint and the author discuss the foundational belief that our nature is to love God, but due to our concupiscence, our wills are impeded from following our nature, though we know we should. Jesus is offering to the Jews who would accuse him and all generations who would read or hear his gospel a full healing, to be made whole, of not only our bodies but of our souls and our wills, by grace. Hope (remember- more like Trust) is offered in that our concupiscence has not completely “darkened our intellect” such that we know what we should do in spite of not doing it (weakened will) and that through the right of conversion, we have a path to salvation in “House of Mercy”. Just as Jesus subjected his will to that of the Father’s (see John 5:17-19) we too “in a state of journeying” or “process of becoming” (CCC 310) with concupiscence, are to subject our weakened wills to our Father’s in unifying perfection.

* At Bethesda, “The House of Mercy”, the paralytic is “made whole” (cured physically and of sin), but is warned to “sin no more that nothing worse befall you.” The physical instrument of water appears to heal the man completely- a baptism- a washing, a renewal of life in the pool. How do you view your baptism? Something that happened without your consent? A grace given to you by the cooperative love of you parents? Have you honored them by thanking them? Have you taken the House of Mercy and the Hope of redemption for granted? How often or do you give *todah* (thanksgiving) to God for your baptism?
* If you were to be asked by Jesus, “Do you wish to be made whole or healed?” What would come to your mind as needing a cure? Healing of some physical ailment or sinfulness? Would you trust in his infinite Love and Mercy, that the Great Physician would cure all that is in need without asking? In the confessional, do you find yourself in need of healing for faults you are not even aware you have? Do you ask for absolution for “secret faults” you are too blind to see or too deaf to hear, too numb or hard of heart to feel, too clogged up to smell, or too bereft or insensitive to taste in bitter humility?
* Do you think Jesus would offer more if you were able to verbalize what more you are in need of knowing that you are still in a “process of becoming” or “a state of journeying?” Why or why not?
* Do you believe, as our saint does, that we “made in the image and likeness of God” are configured to Love God? Why or why not? Further if you do, do you accept the idea that the reason we don’t love God as we know we should is because our wills are more wounded by concupiscence that our intellects? If not, what other explanation would you offer?
* Understanding that sacramentals prepare us to receive the Sacraments and that they are not talismans or magic (no inherent divine or supernatural qualities), how does this (or does it) your interaction with or thinking about medals, holy water, blessed candles, incense, blessings, the rosary or chaplets? Is there need to change anything in your interaction with them that will bring healing of the sacraments to you or others and your expectations?

**Friday of the Fourth Week in Lent: John 7:1-2, 10, 25-30**

**Spiritual Reflection**: This gospel reading is the pre-lude to our 5th Sunday of Lent Gospel- Cycle C, set during the Jewish Festival of Booths (Tabernacles), but unlike the Sunday Gospel teaching on the adulterous women, mercy and gentle push towards virtue, this gospel is about belief in and knowing God with proof of that knowledge given public signs, not self-proclamation.

Our saint tells us that “whoever alleges an extraordinary mission must prove it [as] Moses, St. John the Baptist and even Our Lord demonstrate[d].” After being urged to prove himself in Judea in signs so that they might know that he is the Christ, “for even his brethren [in Galilee] did not believe in him.” [John7:5] Jesus tells his disciples to go to Judea and that he will not go; but he goes up privately (secretly). While there the Jews argue about Jesus and who he might or might not be, (the Christ, or a blasphemous carpenter’s son from Nazareth) doubting that he fulfills Jewish tradition (that he comes from obscurity, only revealing himself in adulthood) or prophesy (that the Messiah would come from Bethlehem, Mic 5:2)—of course both were fulfilled—Jesus proclaims that though they know superficial things about him they don’t really “know him” or “*yadah*” him “covenantal knowing” know him.

* How often do we think we know someone, because we know their name, where they live, where they go to church? We are told to love our God with all our Hearts all our minds and all our strength and to love others as God loves us. Can we truly we love another without loving their spirit- that divine part of them made of God? How do we move past superficial knowledge?
* How do we get to know the spiritual part of another human being? How do we get to *yadah* God? How do we open the lines of communication to God and to others? How do you let others *yadah* you? Are you willing to be that vulnerable? Why or why not?
* Jesus tells his disciples that he will not go to Judea (to prove himself), but goes up secretly, after they have gone. Why do you think this is? Since God is not a deceiver, but the Great Teacher, what is he teaching us about the disciples who were closest to him? What is he teaching us about “his brethren”?
* How has God surprised you by “popping up in the middle of a Festival”? Did you notice? If you did notice, what did he have to say? Did you get to *yadah* God? What did you learn about yourself? Sometimes Grace may not feel like it at the time. Was this the case with you? How long did it take to recognize and bear the full fruitfulness of the encounter? Sometimes the fruit is not given all at once, but a bite at a time, since our Father knows us better than we know ourselves. Do you thank God for his gentle, bite-sized servings?

* During this reflection we discussed *yadah* or covenantal-knowing at beginning of the festival and the middle of the festival. But Jesus continues for a third time (how very Trinitarian of Him!) at the very end of the festival with (Jn 7: 37-38) where He teaches, “On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and proclaimed, “If anyone thirst [for *yadah*], let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart shall flow river of living water’” [an apparent general reference to multiple instances where Grace is meted out in metaphors of abundant water, floods, rivers etc. e.g. IS 41:17, 41:18, 43:20, 44:3 ]. He is telling us the reward for covenantal knowing of Him. Do you wish for your thirst to be satisfied in a deluge coming from the side of Christ? How will you seek to *yadah* God? Or will you? Why or why not?