

5th Sunday of Lent C

Let the first among you
who is without sin
cast the first stone

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We seem to be hooked on answers. As long as we find the right answers, this is an end in itself. To arrive at a perfect score is what we aspire to. But are the questions we ask the right ones?

In the first reading, Jews languished in exile. They questioned if God could save them? And if he could, whether he would save them? The prophet considered these not daring enough. God would create a greater exodus. The desert wandering of the exodus would be renewed with water and rivers in the desert. Past knowledge of God would be updated with a new knowledge of him. The wrong question was: Will God forget us? The right question was: How much greater will our new destiny be?

In the second reading, Paul's question was not how bad was my past, but what does the future hold? Consideration of how he had persecuted the Church and whether he had obtained righteousness by fulfillment of the law was inappropriate now. The right question was whether he would attain resurrection of the dead.

In the Gospel the wrong question was: whether the woman should be killed. The power of the death penalty was held by the Roman authorities. But Jewish law proscribed death for adulterers which included the man as well. They tried to trap Jesus by having him pick rejecting Roman rule or Jewish law. The implied right question is: What is the extent of mercy?

What was Jesus writing on the ground? Some theologians speculate that he was writing down the sins of the accusers. As each saw his sin written, he turned and left.