

**5th Sunday of Lent (C), 2010**  
**Homily – St. Benedict’s Parish**  
**21/22 March 2010**

You saw them...the earthquake victims of Haiti.<sup>1</sup>  
The ones who came out alive left most of their stuff behind.  
They had to. They had to so they could begin anew.  
They realized they were saved and started their lives all over again.

And you?  
What do you need to leave behind?  
What soul spring-cleaning do you need to do?

After all that’s what the word Lent means. It is an Old English word meaning Spring-time.<sup>2</sup>  
It is related to the word “lengthen” because in the Northern Hemisphere,  
it is when the daylight hours are lengthening.

Lent, like Spring, is a time to see ourselves in a new light; to see things anew.

It’s time to see that Jesus is our one and only Savior. That’s what the name “Jesus/Yeshua/Joshua” means – Yahweh saves. Remember Matthew’s Gospel, when the angel says to Joseph “you shall name him Jesus because He shall save the people from their sins?”<sup>3</sup> Jesus is the Savior of the world!

He is the “something new”<sup>4</sup> prophesied by Isaiah. “Do you not perceive it?”<sup>5</sup>  
“He has done great things for us,” as our Psalm said today. We ought to be “filled with joy.”<sup>6</sup>

So unburden yourself this Lent. Stop schlepping your sins and recognize your Savior!<sup>7</sup>

Let’s do something St. Ignatius Loyola often suggests in his *Spiritual Exercises*.<sup>8</sup>  
Let’s put ourselves into the Gospel scene.  
Let’s be there and examine ourselves spiritually as the woman caught in adultery.

If we do it well, like her, we sinners will be standing with Jesus, the only One who saves us.  
Un-condemned!

[At this point in the homily, at all Masses, I asked for prayer, since I was about to speak of serious and sensitive things; things I had never spoken about from the ambo before.]<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The catastrophic earthquake that struck Haiti 12 January 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Oxford English Dictionary etymology of “Lenten” - [OE. *lēnten* str. masc. corresponds to MDu. *lentin*, OHG. *lengizin* (*mânôth*), shortened *lenzin*: app. a derivative or a compound of the shorter synonym which appears as MLG., MDu., Du. *lente* fem., OHG. *langiz*, *langaz* str. masc. (MHG. *langez*, mod. Ger. dialects *langis*, etc.), also OHG. *lenzo* wk. masc. (MHG. *lenze*, mod.G. *lenz*). The shorter form (? OTeut. type *\*laŋgito-*, *\*laŋgiton-*) seems to be a derivative of *\*laŋgo-* LONG a., and may possibly have reference to the lengthening of the days as characterizing the season of spring. It is doubtful whether the ending of the longer form is a mere derivative suffix, or whether it represents an OTeut. *\*tino-* day, cognate with *\*-tino-* in Goth. *Sinteins* daily, and with Skr. *dina*, OSl. *děnъ*, Lith. *dėnà* day. The ecclesiastical sense of the word is peculiar to Eng.; in the other Teut. langs. the only sense is ‘spring’. As an ordinary n. *lenten* has been superseded by the shortened form.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 1:21.

<sup>4</sup> Isaiah 43:19; today’s First Reading.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Psalm 126:3; today’s Psalm response.

<sup>7</sup> A colloquial way of expressing the fundamental meaning of Philippians 3:8-14; today’s Second Reading.

<sup>8</sup> Praying with our Imaginations. St. Ignatius Loyola often uses the instruction “I will see...” or “I will see in my mind...” in the *Spiritual Exercises*. I am using *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, translated by Anthony Mottola, Ph.D., Image Books, Doubleday, NY, 1989.

<sup>9</sup> I have asked for prayer in the midst of difficult homilies before. I base this practice on the *Exsultet* in which the deacon asks for prayer before he continues the Easter Praises.

***See this poor woman!***

*Really see her.* Be there with her.

This poor woman put in the middle— put...

-in the middle of John's Gospel (though it sounds more like Luke's Gospel)<sup>10</sup>

-in the middle of Jesus' lesson<sup>11</sup>

-in the middle of the crowd<sup>12</sup>

-in the middle of a man and another woman

-in the middle of a religious dispute between the Pharisees and Jesus<sup>13</sup>

***See this poor woman!*** – picture her.

How do you see her?

Is she a pretty young thing?

Naïve?

Being used by the man? Or using him?

Is she older? bored? Looking for sexual excitement?

Is she desperate for money?

Is she in love with the man?

How do you see her?

***See this poor woman!***

*She must be angry.*

It takes two to tangle in adultery. There is a double standard here. Where is the man?

Is the man going to pick up a stone?<sup>14</sup>

Did he make a secret deal with his friends to catch the woman in the act with him?

Is he a Pharisee himself?

She must be angry? Where is the man?

Men, where are you today?

It's so easy to use women, to leave girlfriends, wives and children now...

In fact, even "good" fathers sometimes just bring home the money  
and leave the kids to the woman to raise.

It's so easy to indulge ourselves sexually:

To use women;

To let women perform for us; to satisfy our sexual desires;

To think that porn, strip clubs, lap dances, internet chats with other women,  
college and even high school hook-ups,  
are no big deal because "everyone does that."

So where are you sexually?

Maybe you even think that God doesn't care about sexuality; that there are no sexual sins.??

If so, I am afraid that you and I worship different gods.

It is abundantly clear through Scripture and Tradition that my God cares about human sexuality.

I sure hope He does!

As a man, my sexuality is a very important part of who I am.

I sure *hope* God cares about that!

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<sup>10</sup> See note in NAB John 7:53-8:11. This note suggests a possible placement after Luke 21. I posted about the canonical history on St. Benedict's Blog, <http://stbenedictsamherstnyblog.blogspot.com/> 18 March 2010.

<sup>11</sup> John 8:2.

<sup>12</sup> John 8:3.

<sup>13</sup> I might have added "in the middle of the Roman authorities and Mosaic Law," if the "test" in question is interpreted as political, along the lines of the "coin test" of Mt. 22:15-21.

<sup>14</sup> It should be noted that this pericope, unlike others having to do with Jesus Himself being threatened with stoning, never says anyone picked up stones. This is one of the reasons I do not think the stoning aspect of this pericope should be accented too much.

So where are you sexually?  
Do you really think that a woman getting pregnant means your life is “ruined?”  
Where did this idea come from?  
What most people mean is that they won’t have as much money as they thought!

Are you willing to “accept children lovingly from God?”<sup>15</sup>  
or maybe you pressure women –wives, girlfriends, one night stands! - into getting abortions?

So where are you sexually, men?  
When it comes to treating women, maybe you’re not really men at all.

***See this poor woman!***

*She must be ashamed.*  
Someday, at the general judgment, I will stand before all of you like this poor woman  
and you will know everything about me – all my sins, all the pain I’ve caused, all my faults.  
I’ll be naked before you. Ashamed. Please forgive me.

It’s interesting to note how much shame is especially attached to sexual sin.

There’s the sin of Adam and Eve  
when they first realized they were naked and covered up.<sup>16</sup>  
And the adulterous affair of David and Bathsheba,<sup>17</sup>  
And Hosea and his adulterous wife<sup>18</sup>  
And, of course, the Whore of Babylon...<sup>19</sup>  
The Bible is just full of sexual sins and shame.

Sexual sins are there in literature too...<sup>20</sup>  
In Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*<sup>21</sup>  
In Boccaccio’s *Decameron*<sup>22</sup>  
In Dante’s *Inferno*<sup>23</sup>  
And just about everything James Joyce ever wrote!<sup>24</sup>

And today, sexual sins run across our screens -- on CNN, Fox and MSNBC.  
The Pope himself is speaking of them.<sup>25</sup>

**Do you know how ashamed I am of the sexual sins of my Church?**

(And, unless you are a visitor, you know that I love the Church with every fiber of my being.  
I mention my love for the Church in every homily.)

But I am deeply ashamed of the sexual sins of our Church.  
Maybe as a married man with three children, I am in a unique position to speak on this.

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<sup>15</sup> Rite of Marriage, Statement of Intentions, 59.

<sup>16</sup> See Genesis 3:8-21.

<sup>17</sup> See 2 Samuel 11, 12; and Psalm 51.

<sup>18</sup> See the Book of Hosea, especially verses 1 and 2.

<sup>19</sup> See Revelation 17 and 18.

<sup>20</sup> I intentionally chose a variety of European literatures – English, Italian and Irish.

<sup>21</sup> See Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*, “The Friar’s Tale.”

<sup>22</sup> See Giovanni Boccaccio’s *Decameron: Prencipe Galeotto*, Tales I,4; III, 3.

<sup>23</sup> See Dante Alighieri’s *La Divina Commedia, Inferno*, Circle 2, canto 5.

<sup>24</sup> See James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, final episode; *Finnigan’s Wake*, book 3. *Dubliners - An Encounter*.

<sup>25</sup> *Pastoral Letter Of The Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI To The Catholics Of Ireland*, 19 March 2010. See <http://www.vatican.va> for text and video.

You know that I teach high school religion.  
Do you know how hard it is to stand in front of a group of teenage boys<sup>26</sup> –  
right at the moment when their sexuality is a huge deal to them – and teach morality?

You can see it in their eyes, and sometimes they even say it, –  
“you, - Catholics!- telling me what is right or wrong?  
You cannot even get your own sexual act together. You’re hypocrites!”  
While I have theoretical arguments for them, there is clearly great truth in the saying:  
“I can’t hear you because your *actions* are screaming at me.”

You don’t have to a teacher to be ashamed of the Church’s sexual sins.  
Many of you have heard the snarky remarks and jokes at work and parties.  
In fact, some of you no longer mention that you are Catholic anymore. You’re embarrassed.  
That’s how evil works - maybe even Satan himself - terrible deeds make good people silent now.

I am ashamed and I am sorry.  
I do not apologize for the Church’s teaching on human sexuality and neither should you.  
I find the Church’s teaching life-giving, and truthful, and just what needs to be spoken to our generation.

**However, I do apologize for the Church’s sexual sins.**

**And I, for one, am deeply ashamed.**

*I apologize to all the victims.  
I apologize for those who have caused you unbearable pain.*

*I apologize to those whose sexual identity has been warped  
by sinful Church leaders and terrible teachers.*

*I apologize for those who do not practice what they preach (myself included).*

May God have mercy on their souls.

I am ashamed and deeply sorry.

***See this poor woman???***

*She must be frightened!*

She might be killed so that men could prove a point.  
It looks like evil is going to win. Jesus is so outnumbered.

And I wonder whose side I would be on.  
I wonder, as a religious leader, if I would have picked up a stone.  
Maybe I’d even be the Pharisee who brought her to Jesus.

I wonder if I’d be guilty of the ancient sin of hypocrisy  
or the thoroughly modern sin of thinking there are no sexual sins at all.  
Would I get Jesus’ ethical balance just right?  
And that frightens me too.

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<sup>26</sup> The high school Confirmandi (male and female) were present at the Vigil Mass as part of their day of retreat.

***See this poor woman!***

*She must have peeked over Jesus' shoulder to see what He was writing!*

Whatever he wrote in the ground that day made angry sinful men disappear one by one.

(and sins always disappear one by one in the Presence of Jesus.)

And *what a man* Jesus is here! Do you see how he treats her?

He lowers Himself in her presence – this is no time for eye contact with her.

Sinful men have made her an object of exhibition; Jesus does not.

Three times he rises from ground (like the three days He will spend in the tomb).

He treats her with dignity. What a man Jesus is! He knows how to treat women.

See the smile beginning to show on her face? She is starting to feel human again.

She must have peeked at what He was writing. That's why she is smiling!

She must have peeked and saw Jesus writing all the sins of the world – one by one – your sins and mine.

There He is – the Lamb of God writing all the sins of the world that morning; He could have been there forever.

But the sins He wrote on the ground that morning stayed only until Easter Sunday – then disappeared.

***See this saved woman!***

*How human, how alive, she must have felt when she realized she was not alone in her sin.*

We are there too. With her.

She is one of us again.

Her sin one of many.

Jesus wasn't just doing a special favor by saving *her* – He was saving *all* humanity!!!

She was saved, like all of us, by the sinless Savior of the world!

The Bible doesn't say what became of this saved woman. It doesn't have to...

**See,**

**we are her!**