

(10-15 seconds of silences)

Henry David Thoreau once said that “*In human intercourse the tragedy begins, not when there is misunderstanding about words, but when silence is not understood.*”

Silence . . . especially when we do not expect it, like when an Irishman is quiet at a pulpit, is something that we can find uncomfortable. We get unsettled, we shift our weight from one foot to the other or we wriggle in our seats or clear our throats, anything to break the silence.

There are other, more hurtful silences. There is the angry silence that follows an argument and the devastating silence that is the product of contempt.

But not all silence is like that. There is the silence of nature . . . trees and grass as they grow and the movements of the Moon and the Sun. There is the silence between spouses and friends that is born out of confidence in the others love and acceptance.

What strikes me about today’s Gospel is that it is filled with more silence than sound.

There is the silence of expectation as the Pharisees wait for an answer, and the silence of the fear felt by the woman, knowing her fate is in the words of the man writing on the ground.

We are struck here . . . by the silence of Jesus Himself.

It is this hush that we find to be frustrating isn't it? When we ask "Why Lord" and hear nothing. When we await the answer to our prayer and everything remains still.

Why is our Lord so often silent?

Perhaps in this reading, Jesus was saying by his gesture of writing and not speaking:

I am not interested in this cruel game you are playing with this poor woman. I will not give you the response you wish.

In our circumstances, I assure you Jesus is not quiet. We are the ones who ask, but like the Pharisees, we are all-too-often only interested in the answer we desire. Jesus seems silent because we do not listen.

When Jesus knew that they would listen, he tells those in the Gospel today **"Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her."**

Had we been there, who among us could throw as much as a grain of sand?

Gradually and reluctantly the Scribes and Pharisees turn away from Jesus **and the** woman and depart from the scene in solemn silence.

And this sinner finds she is alone with Him, afraid, and without words.

Saint Augustine once said of this moment “There in silence remained the miserable one and the one who is mercy”.

And again, the silence is broken.

“Woman, where are they?” “Has no one condemned you?”

He does not question her about the sin. He does not shame or belittle or lecture her.

She stands before the one who is the judge of the whole world, the one who can read the hearts of those who are before him, and he says quietly and lovingly: “Neither do I condemn you. Go and do not sin anymore.”

The gracious Lord of mercy acquits her of her sin that was, by law, deserving of death . . . but more than that . . . he forgives and releases her. He acts as both a righteous judge and a savior!

He has saved her from a horrific physical death but also from the deeper death which sin brings about.

Moreover, in telling her to sin no more, --He has forgiven her sin but not condoned it—he is offering her the grace and power to live a life of justice and holiness before God.

This poor woman is poor no more. She is freed from death and sin, having experienced, as Paul mentions in our second reading, **the supreme good of knowing Jesus Christ.**

Thanks be to God. Her past no longer matters! Now she can move forward . . . living in the *joy* of salvation,

This touching story of the sinful woman is, in many ways, our story.

All of us are sinners. We are all caught and convicted in our sinfulness either as it is seen by the eyes of others or the eyes of our own conscience. In our sin, we experience guilt, misery, fear of **condemnation**, and loss of hope.

But **then** we encounter Jesus! We meet him in prayer, in the Eucharist, in unexpected people and places and circumstances . . . and in the Sacrament of Reconciliation

It is in this Sacrament that we come to know his compassion, his grace, his tenderness. We experience as the sinful woman in today's gospel did, the great joy of salvation.

In this Holy Season, we are called to break the silence, to come to Jesus and whisper in His ear, through His Priest, our most secret sins. And in the words of absolution, to hear and to know that Jesus does not condemn us, but restores us to God so that we too might, through His generous mercy, go and sin no more, Thanks be to God.