



MEDITATIONS FOR LENT by Father Robbie Low

FIFTH WEEK OF LENT – MONDAY John 8: 12 - 20

The story of the woman taken in adultery is the subject of a very old Catholic joke. When the Jesus challenges the crowd: 'Whoever is without sin can throw the first stone.' There is a brief silence and then a great rock comes hurtling towards the woman in question. Jesus turns and says, 'Mother!'

Of course it is not a funny story. Adultery is a serious business. It wounds love. It breaks families. It is a betrayal at the deepest most intimate level of our being. It is, unsurprisingly but very graphically, an image that Scripture often uses to portray our infidelity to God and the persistent wounding of His heart by our sinful promiscuity.

Jesus is not defending adultery here - indeed His parting shot to the woman is to remind her not to sin again. His purpose is to answer the challenge of the mob as to the fate of the sinner by turning the question back upon them. They are, as we human beings too often are, all geared up to condemn the monstrous failings of the other person and simultaneously overlooking our own. Most of our sins tend to be private and thus easily concealed.

Being caught by the mob in the wrong bedroom is less easily finessed. So Jesus' initial response is silence. Time to reflect, time to halt the mad emotional rush to judgement – always good practice.

Then He draws with His finger in the dust. This is the very dust out of which, as the Word, He created Man and to which every man will, in the words of the Ash Wednesday signing, one day return. Only then does He speak.

They will not have missed the point. Let the sinless one throw the first stone and begin the sentence of death. And this is the bit I really love...St John tells us:
'They all began to leave, one by one, beginning with the eldest'.

The longer in the tooth you get, the more you know what you don't know, the more aware you become of your failings, the more baggage you trail behind you. The younger guys are immortal and know it all. Death is a distant prospect and they are always confident they are right. But the old guys get it. Jesus has skewered us good and proper. We are conscious of our all too frequent infidelities to God and the stone of judgement sits uncomfortably in our hand.

Spiritual exercise: Pick up a large stone and cradle it for a while.
Remember someone who has fallen under your judgement.
When you are ready, put it down and walk away.