

Lent 5C 2012
Father Frank Matera
See, I Am Doing Something New!

Put yourself in the place of this woman. She has just been dragged from the scene of her crime. Humiliated, she is filled with guilt and shame. She is circled by a hostile crowd of self-righteous men. She trembles with fear. She has violated the Law of Moses, and she knows what the punishment will be. From her point of view, there is no hope for mercy or acquittal; there is no possibility of forgiveness. Her world is crumbling around her.

Put yourself in the place of her accusers. All of them are upright men, pillars of the community, to whom others look for guidance and instruction. They are outraged at what she has done. With the self-assurance that the self-righteousness enjoy they are convinced they are doing God's work. By exposing the sin of this woman, they will assure that no one does what she has done. These men are not tortured by self-doubt. They know what is right and wrong, and so they publicly condemn this woman.

Now put yourself in the place of Jesus. Like the accusers of this woman; he knows what the Law of Moses commands. Like the accusers of this woman he knows that those who commit adultery are liable to death. Like the accusers of this woman, he knows that she has sinned. But unlike the accusers of this woman, he understands the mercy and compassion of God. Unlike the accusers of this woman, he knows that God is doing something new, something unheard of. And yes, he knows the hypocrisy of the woman's accusers.

For those who accuse her, this woman is of no account. She is just the means whereby they hope to entrap Jesus. For, if Jesus refuses to condemn her, they can accuse him of violating the Law of Moses. But Jesus refuses to be drawn into their trap; he refuses to answer their question. Like a student who doodles when bored by his teacher, or like a congregation that checks its watch when bored by its preacher, Jesus writes in the ground. He refuses to debate with these men.

But the religious leaders will not be put off. And so, when they insist that he answer them, Jesus invites the one without sin to throw the first stone. Let the one among you who has not done what this woman has done be the first to execute her. The religious leaders—all of them guilty—find themselves in the situation of this poor woman. But instead of condemning them, Jesus offers them a way to break out of their world of judgment and condemnation and enter a world of forgiveness and grace. He offers them a chance to change their lives.

Jesus is now alone with the woman, and just as he offered the religious leaders a way into a new world, so he offers the woman a way to break out of her old world and enter the world of God's grace and forgiveness. Has anyone condemned you, he asks. "No one," he answers, "Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin anymore." Jesus offers the woman entrance into a new world, a world of grace and mercy, a world without sin.

Jesus invites each one of us into that new world of grace and mercy. He invites us into a world in which we do not judge or condemn. He fulfills the words of the prophet, "Remember not the events of the past ...see I am doing something new!" Jesus shows us what St. Paul means

when he writes, “I consider everything as loss because of the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus ... not having any righteousness of my own ...but that which comes through faith in Jesus Christ.”

If you are still living in that old world of sin, enter the new world of God’s grace and forgiveness, and sin no more. Receive the Sacrament of Penance and know the power of God’s grace. If you are living in that old world self-righteousness, judgment and condemnation, allow Christ to break the bars of the prison in which you have placed yourself. Do not judge and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. For in Christ Jesus, God is doing something new.

God is doing something new in the choice of a pope who has chosen the name Francis. Something new is happening in the choice of a pope who has lived his life in simplicity and dedication to the poor. Something new is happening because God is always renewing the church—even when the church does not want to be renewed. On this St. Patrick’s Day, when we celebrate the faith of our fathers and mothers, let us become part of this new thing, this world of grace and forgiveness.