

As we begin to peel back the many layers of today's Gospel reading perhaps the first thing we find is a question of justice. The scribes and the Pharisees bring a woman to Jesus and righteously proclaim that she had been **caught in the very act** of committing adultery. They remind Him, correctly, that the Law of Moses **demande**d that such women be stoned to death. But they seemed to have forgotten that both Leviticus and Deuteronomy, **actually** demanded that **"both the adulterer and the adulteress shall be put to death."** Now unless this woman had somehow invented some new way of committing adultery by herself ... there seems to have been something very unjust going on here ... something unjust and something very hypocritical.

As we continue to the next layer we uncover a problem of truth ... truth about the woman. We don't know who she was. Some Scholars ... and Hollywood ... have speculated that she was Mary Magdalene ... but there is no evidence to support that and most Scripture scholars reject that notion. No ... we don't know who she was but we certainly know what she was ... she was an adulteress ... but more to the point ... she was a pawn ... in a vicious game these duplicitous scribes and Pharisees were playing ... to entrap Jesus ... to ultimately lead to His discrediting ... and hopefully ... His death!

After all ... Jesus had claimed that He had not come to destroy the Law ... but to fulfill the Law. So if He respected the **Law** ... , how could He **not** condemn her? His failure to condemn would make Him appear hypocritical! He would be seen as "soft on" immorality. But what if He did?

The way Mosaic Law was **supposed** to work was that the woman ... **and** the man ... would have been brought before the Sanhedrin and sentenced to death ... but Rome had removed the **authority** ... to impose the **death** penalty from Jewish tribunals. So if Jesus **upheld** Mosaic Law ... and agreed to the woman's death ... the mob ... agitated by the scribes and Pharisees ... would have stoned her then and there. Then He who had proclaimed "Render unto Caesar " would be guilty of willfully disobeying Roman Law ... and could have been hauled up before the Roman authorities and accused of inciting the crowd to murder and ...as an **added** bonus he would then also be seen as

cold-hearted in the eyes of those to whom He ministered.

How could He possibly condemn the woman? ... How could He not? ... Jesus seems to be caught in the no win scenario. But once again ... not as man sees does God see.

This brings us to the next layer: **understanding**. These scribes and Pharisees had forgotten ... what God had spoken through Isaiah: *“Remember not the events of the past, the things of long ago consider not; see, I am doing something new! Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?”* ... Perceive it? Not **hardly** ... they could not **grasp** the notion that this Old Covenant they cherished so much with its harsh, unforgiving law ... was merely laying the **groundwork** ... for what was to come ... that there was now to be a **new** covenant ... through this Jesus that they hated and feared so much ... a new covenant based on mercy, forgiveness and compassion ... concepts that ... in their legalistic, self-righteousness ... were incomprehensible!

So now we have the final layer ... through His love and compassion ... Jesus found the third choice. He began writing on the ground ... what, no one knows. It's not important that we know what He wrote. It's only important what those members of the mob **thought** He wrote! You see Deuteronomy also stated that someone could **only** be put to death on the testimony of at least **two** witnesses. Furthermore ... the hands of these witnesses must be the **first** one raised ... to put that person to death! But Jesus added: *“Let the one among you who is **without** sin ... be the first to throw a stone at her.”* The witnesses all disappeared ... one by one. His was a challenge was one ... **no** one could meet ... not then ... not now!

Oh, He did not **condone** her sin. He did not say: “No Problem ... it's OK!” His forgiveness and mercy are implied “Neither do I condemn you.” But they come with an admonition: “Go, and from now on do not sin anymore.” He tells us the same thing. He forgives us but requires a committed effort to amend our lives ... to avoid sin in the future. He also demands that we show the same compassion for others ... that he modeled for us ... to forgive ... as we have been forgiven ... perhaps something to ponder ... in this “Year of Mercy”.