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The Adulterous Woman

By: Marcellino D'Ambrosio



It really looked like the end of the road for her. Guilty of a capital crime, caught in the act, her fate appeared in the hands of an angry mob. Rather than just dealing with the adulteress on the spot, they decided to use her as a political tool, and so dragged her to Jesus, thinking they'd kill two birds with one stone.

But they badly miscalculated. He replied to their tough question with a tougher question. They planned to embarrass him. But he embarrassed them. They had to silently admit the hypocrisy of their self-righteousness. They walked away and left her standing there before the one who was truly without sin, truly righteous. But Righteousness did not condemn. He forgave. Now that's different! It really hadn't been seen ever before, at least not like this. "See I am doing something new! Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?" (v. 19 of Isaiah 43, but go read the whole chapter!).

Jesus offers a brand new start to this anonymous adulteress. She could be Mary Magdalene, as in Mel' Gibson's film. Or she could be anyone. We are all guilty of adultery, at least in sense that the book of Hosea uses the word. God is the spouse who has given us everything and deserves our absolute and exclusive loyalty. We should worship the ground he walks on. But instead we've cheated on him, looking for fulfillment and excitement from other lovers who have not delivered what they promised. Given that he is the source of Life itself, rejecting Him means choosing death.

It seems so easy for Jesus to say to the adulteress (and to all of us) "neither do I condemn you." With those words, he saved her from death and gave her a brand new start. So what did it cost her? "Go and sin no more" is her program. She must change her life.

But what did it cost *Him*? Everything. He must not just change his life. He must lose it. In "the Passion of the Christ," one of the most poignant scenes is when Mary rushes to be with Jesus as he collapses under the weight of the cross. In that agonizing moment that he looks up at her and says, "See, I make all things new (Rev. 21:5).



A famous German theologian killed by the Nazis, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, liked to point out the difference between "cheap grace" and "costly grace." Grace is free. It is the absolutely unmerited gift of pardon and loving friendship extended

to us by God in a way that transforms us and makes all things new. But such grace is not cheap. It was paid for by the suffering of God's Son, suffering that he willingly embraced out of love for us (note in the movie how Jesus draws a rebuke from one of the condemned thieves for caressing his cross!).



Paul needed this grace desperately. He occupied a conspicuous place among the self-righteous, a member of the blood-thirsty crowd that stoned Stephen. When on the road to Damascus he realized who he was and what he deserved, he saw the grace offered to him as more precious than gold. It was the pearl of great price. In light of this treasure, all else appeared as trash (he actually uses a rather vulgar word for "compost" in Phil 3:8). He was not satisfied to be a passive spectator, an uninvolved bystander. Rather he wanted to share personally in Christ's sufferings and so come to experience the exhilarating power of his resurrection, the love that is stronger than death. He saw the finish line ahead with heaven as the prize and decided to go for the gold.

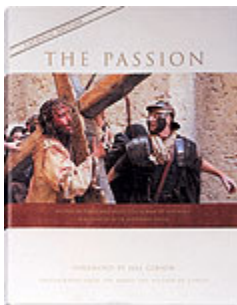
That grace is available to you. The question is, how precious do you view it? What value do you place on it? It is offered to you daily through the Eucharist, the Word of God, and prayer. Are you too busy to fit these into your schedule? How much effort are you putting in to grasp the prize? Are you sprinting, walking, or just moping?

Actions speak louder than words. Let's examine where we spend our time, money and energy. That will tell us what it is that we really value most.



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