Fifth Sunday of Lent (C) 2019

‘I believe that nothing can happen that would outweigh the supreme advantage of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord’. So says St Paul in our second reading. Sentiments echoed, I’m sure, by the woman taken in adultery, that we hear of in the gospel. Publicly shamed and humiliated by men, dragged out like an animal before the crowd; restored to dignity and life by Jesus, in the gentlest of ways.

This is one of the most hopeful stories in the Gospel. But why are we presented with it so close to Holy Week? Well it IS a resurrection story. The woman, being identified as a sinner on the road to death. Jesus takes responsibility for the sinner, changes her destiny - from death to life. And we remember that he himself will be dragged before the crowd; humiliated and condemned to die.

We say, in every mass, ‘Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world’. We say it, but we forget to use it; forget to use it when we are confronted with sins in ourselves or others that seem very hard to forgive. When we pray it in that context we see what Jesus’ sacrifice means - he will carry the sins that overburden us. If we let him he will set us free. The ‘Lamb of God’ in mass accompanies a very important action - the two are tied together - the action is the breaking of bread - watch out for it. This action has many layers of meaning - but a most important one is recalling that Jesus was broken for us; sacrificed himself for us; rescued us.

The woman taken in adultery was destined to be destroyed; Jesus recreates her. His very act of restoring her to life was a firm step down the road of his own suffering and death - for it was actions and words like these that so infuriated the religious authorities that they sought to have him condemned.

The judgement of the world can be very cruel; tinged with darkness and violence - the reverse of the judgement of our God as expressed in Jesus. He encourages us to ‘sin no more’ by treating us with love and preserving our dignity. We too can make St Paul’s words our own. ‘I believe that nothing can happen that would outweigh the supreme advantage of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord’.