Sunday of the Samaritan Woman
May 17, 2020

You are Worthy

Christ is risen! Χριστός Ανέστη!

There’s an Arab proverb that states that you should write the bad things that happen to you in the sand, so that they can be easily erased from your memory. Truth be told, most of us engrave the bad things that happen to us in marble, so that our painful memories remain immortalized in our minds.

We all make mistakes, encounter bad things, wish we did the things we ideally want to do. And more often than not we beat ourselves up for years, even forever, perhaps even defining ourselves by our actions.

“The labels we bear come from within and from without. Society teaches us how to think about ourselves, how to think about others, and ultimately how to blame ourselves. We are not born like this; we learn how to think from the people around us, and we go along with it because we don’t know any better.
The task we who seek healing and betterment (that is, union with God) is that we must recognize, and soothe, and defuse the defensive parts of us, so that the truth in us that seeks God can speak and be heard. Internal peace can only be won by openness and love.” (FrAntony Hughes)

Today we hear about Christ speaking to a woman of Samaria, someone He would never have been expected to interact with. But as He does so often, He breaks down barriers to unity, disregards all labels, and calls all people to Himself.

I cannot help but be amazed, every time I read this gospel, by the exchange at the outset. Christ approaches the woman and asks for a drink of water and she is taken aback that a Jewish man would speak to her, a Samaritan woman; an encounter
forbidden by Jewish Law, and for a man of spiritual repute, it was all the more shocking. The woman questions why he is speaking with her.

She has a tone of *unworthiness* in her voice, as though everything she has been told her whole life was that she was not worthy to interact with such a man. We know the labels she saw upon herself, that her society placed on her. We know that she had 5 husbands and was labeled by society as a shameful person. She was a social outcast among social outcasts, the lowest of the low, the hated of her society, and yet… this is the woman Christ holds his longest recorded conversation with!

Christ disregarded the many labels this woman was burdened with: woman; Samaritan; adulteress, and he approached her, communicating her worthiness and her value in His words and His actions. She also was compassionate to herself, accepting the love Christ offered her. She dropped her labels, and her blame, and her shame, and her defensiveness in favor of something much greater: love and openness.

Today the Lord calls us to look carefully at ourselves and be honest: how do we define ourselves? What is our sense of self? What actions have we made in the past that we allow to define us? How many of us have been told we are unworthy of something? Unworthy of love? Unworthy of acceptance? And how many of us have believed this?

We see from the words and actions of Christ that He doesn’t care about what other people have told her about how to act, who to avoid, or what to tell herself; He doesn’t even care about her past actions and mistakes! But He offers her His hand so that she can be transformed. He doesn’t care about what people have told us, either; or, perhaps even more powerfully, He doesn’t care what we have told ourselves! Our past is our past, and when we own what we have done (not with shame or ridicule, but with humble honesty), we can leave behind the heavy burden of our mistakes. “Come to me all you who are heavy laden and I will give you rest. For my burden is easy and my yoke is light”.

It is hard for us to move past our mistakes...we engrave our sins in marble, never allowing ourselves to move past them... the evil one constantly sends thoughts to try
to divide us from one another and from God. Thoughts such as “I don’t deserve to be forgiven… I should be punished for what I’ve done… I am so stupid… I’m unlovable”. These are the words of the evil one; they are not the words of God.

What does God tell us? He tells us that we are unconditionally loved. Psalm 129 says: “If you kept a record of our sins, Lord, who could survive? But with You is mercy and forgiveness…” Each of us, also, no matter what we have done, have the chance to change the marble engravings of our sins into sand, which is wiped away in an instant by the love of God.

Christ’s lengthy conversation with the Samaritan Woman shatters the bonds of her social prison and tells her she is worthy of a relationship with Him. Nothing could make her unworthy of Christ; not the labels, nor the shame placed on her by her community. Nothing could make her unworthy of Christ.

You are worthy of God and worthy of love. We must be compassionate to ourselves and open ourselves up to Him; not once, but EVERY SINGLE DAY. We don't really become worthy of His love; we just wake up to the fact that that is what we already are.

Christ is risen!