

Chastity and Mercy 4: River Near

'She who has been forgiven of much will love much' (LK 7:47).

Turning from our unchaste ways becomes beautiful when we turn toward Jesus. It's not only family and friends we violated with our jagged divides; we pierced Him too. He retaliates by releasing a fountain of affection for us (Zech. 12:10-13:2) that cleanses and feeds us like the best mother and confirms us like the best father. St. Augustine said that the Church herself was born from Christ's wounds-- the blood and water released at Calvary (JN 19: 34). I would add that her chastity was born there too as we the divided bathe and become whole in the river of His life, poured out for our freedom.

No-one better reveals the magnetic pull of Jesus' mercy than the sinful woman in LK 7: 36-50. Somehow she knew that He alone could set her free from the shameful divisions in her life (probably related to sexual immorality). Socially, the religious elite withered her with just one glance to remind her that she was unfit for holy love. That did not stop her. When she saw Jesus dining with a Pharisee, she seized the moment, enduring the shame for the Mercy sitting before her. She threw herself at His feet and offered her all to Him with great sobs of repentance. I like to think of her positioning herself before His flood of blood and water until it engulfed her and surpassed her tears.

All the while the Pharisee looked askance at the messy encounter. The woman had to contend with his scorn and judgment, a divide that had separated her for too long from the Source of her wholeness. No more! Mercy had permeated her in the person of Jesus and she drew near to Him, never to let go of Him as the link to the life she wanted to live. Her faith saved her; she proceeded in peace (v.50).

She demonstrates to all of us who struggle with moral divides and shame that our cure lies in positioning ourselves before Jesus. Our chastity depends on Him. And it depends on the moral effort we make to abide in familiar, intimate communion with Him. The Catechism is clear that our chastity is 'a long and exacting work' that can never 'be acquired once and for all' (#2342). Yet it is also 'a gift from God, a grace' granted to us by the Holy Spirit to become like Jesus (#2345).

The beautiful thing is that we become like Him through Him; we position ourselves before His merciful flood. That should include stirring up the waters of our baptism in multiple confessions, and many trips to the communion table where we unite our ache with the feast of His body and blood. It may involve extended silence before Him, meditating on Scripture, singing simple love songs to Him and listening to Him sing over us. He has given us a host of ways to live in the river. He is near. It is up to us to get in the water.

That means all of us, regardless of our sexual sin. Though no person's disintegration is exactly alike, the source of our wholeness is: Jesus Christ. It is inspired that we do not know the 'sin' of

the sinful woman--was it lust, masturbation, pornography, fornication, or lesbian activity? Was she a prostitute, perhaps the victim of rape? All of these are included in the Catechism as offenses against chastity (#2351-2359). We who have fractured and been fractured find freedom at His feet. Like her, may our weeping be assumed in the river of Mercy.

‘Jesus, we love You. We thank You, Lord of the Universe, that You draw near to us in our divided state. Help us to see Your mercy more closely than we see the Pharisee. Thank You that You are our one thing, our everything, the consummate friend. Thank You that You are the gift and the goal of our wholeness. Holy Spirit, remind us of the many ways we can live in the river. May we act on those promptings with surety of will and so contribute to the freedom of many. Grant us patience for the lifetime plan of becoming chaste.’

We are looking to hire an Assistant Director for Desert Stream Ministries. [Here is the job description if you'd like to know more.](#)