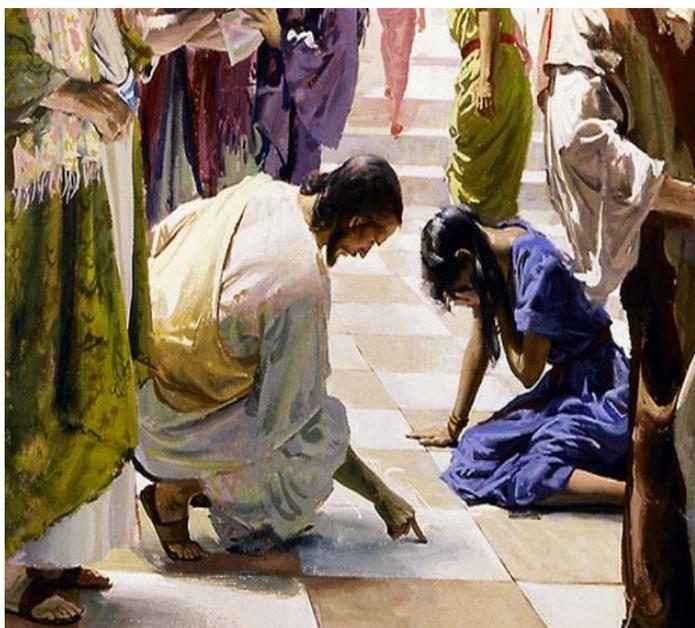


Approximately twenty-five years ago a famous Hollywood leading man was arrested while having a sexual encounter with a prostitute in his car. It didn't make sense to many people. One reason was he had an equally famous, model/actress girlfriend. Two weeks later, he went on the *Tonight Show* with Jay Leno. When the crowd quieted down, after his introduction, Jay Leno said to him with some gusto, "Question number one: What the hell were you thinking!?" The crowd went wild. The actor squirmed in his chair and acknowledged he had done a "bad thing." Obviously, he was not thinking clearly.

Saint Thomas Aquinas and Saint Augustine both wrote that lust blinds an individual because it clouds their reason. A lustful person might make decisions that wouldn't make mom proud. Indulged lust, over a period of time corrupts a person, enslaves and makes prayer difficult. In the worst cases, a person is carrying around a ticking time bomb that may detonate and do significant damage to their life and/or the lives of their family members. For example, your spouse won't divorce you for having a minor argument with your neighbor, but will probably divorce you for sleeping with your neighbor.

Our readings both deal with the ramifications of sexual sin. The first reading takes place in Babylon during the Babylonian captivity (Sixth century BC) within the exiled Jewish community. Joakim was a wealthy and highly respected man within the exiled community. He had a beautiful, young and pious wife named Susanna. Two respected elders, who served as judges within that community, would frequently visit the family home to consult with Joakim. Therefore, they knew Susanna. One day, they hid in Joakim and Susanna's garden hoping to see Susanna bathing. They were voyeurs. When they saw an opportunity, they sexually propositioned her and threatened that if she did not acquiesce, they would claim she was meeting a young man for a sexual encounter. Susanna screamed. People came running to the scene and the elders followed through with their threat. Susanna was ultimately saved from being put to death both by her faith in God and the intervention of the prophet Daniel. The disgraced elders, in turn, were put to death.



The Gospel is a famous one. It is about the woman caught in adultery. In this case, the woman was saved from being stoned to death through the merciful intervention of Our Lord.

One wonders how many times the actor, the elders and the adulterous woman engaged in their sinful activities before they were caught red handed. My guess is, it was nobody's first rodeo.

God usually gives all of us many chances to get it right whether we ask for forgiveness or not. Jesus told the woman caught in adultery to, "go and sin no more." Some people believe this woman was Mary Magdalene, who became Saint Mary Magdalene. If that is the case, her response to being forgiven serves as a model to us all.

Numerous Catholics have told me how much they miss going to Confession and receiving the Eucharist. I understand. That said, do you think it is possible that our past easy access to the sacraments was abused? How many Catholics receive the Eucharist in a state of mortal sin? How many priests celebrate the sacraments in the same manner? My guess is that the number is not insignificant. How many people go to confession with a firm amendment to sin no more? Or to paraphrase, is the attitude more like, "forgive me Father, so I can feel good for a while, at least until I have the opportunity to sin again?" I'd use this "time out" to think about those questions. God cannot be dishonored indefinitely.