Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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“I am the light of the world” (John 8:12).

Dn 13:1-9, 15-17, 19-30, 33-62 or 13:41c-62; Jn 8:12-20

Years ago, when I was teaching high school religion, I managed to lure my students into reading the Bible by telling them *not* to read certain stories. One of them was “Susanna in the Garden,” today’s assigned first reading.

It is a lurid and highly entertaining account of a woman bathing in her garden while being spied on by two corrupt and lustful judges. They demand sex and threaten to expose her to her husband for being with a lover unless she accedes. She resists. A trial follows at which a young boy named Daniel saves her by cross-examining her duplicitous accusers. The Lectionary sometimes parallels this story with the Gospel story of the woman taken in adultery, which seems based on the Susanna tale.

Today’s Gospel passage takes up right where John 8:1-11 leaves off, and it presents Jesus as the light of the world. This highlights Jesus’ wisdom in saving the accused woman from stoning, just as Daniel saved Susanna, because they both see the whole story. Jesus sees because he is the light of the world, but his accusers are blind to the truth. The Pharisees continue to try to entangle Jesus in a legal discussion about whether his claims to represent God can be corroborated. Jesus claims that his testimony is true because God has sent him.

In this final full week of Lent, we are prepared for a descent into darkness during Holy Week by being reminded of the larger story of who Jesus is. After the public triumph of Palm Sunday, Jesus will endure the plotting of his enemies, the betrayal, abandonment and denial of his closest friends, his agony and arrest in the garden

after the Last supper, trial and judgment by the Sanhedrin and Pilate and his crucifixion on Calvary. The light of the world is, by all appearances, about to be extinguished.

Only our shared testimony of faith will guide us through the dark night of loss and confusion the disciples experienced after the death of Jesus. We have been told who he is. But like the first believers, we must also encounter the long interval of darkness as we await the first light of dawn on Easter morning. The message is clear: While we have the light, let us walk forward toward the events of Holy Week.

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