At the climax of The Miracle Worker, the play about deaf and blind Helen Keller and her teacher, Annie Sullivan, Annie spells water into Helen’s hand while water pours over Helen’s other hand. Helen’s face changes as she suddenly makes the connection between the signs Annie is making and the reality of the water. Helen starts touching things wildly while Annie signs the letters in her hand at an ever faster rate. Finally, Helen points to Annie, who spells T-E-A-C-H-E-R in her hand. The best teacher is not the one who can speak the loudest or the most, but the one who patiently does the same thing over and over until the student makes the connection and finally learns.

Jesus is our teacher, and in the Gospel story today he demonstrates it not with a wordy lecture but by drawing in the dust and inviting his reluctant students to think about what they are doing. We don’t know what he wrote, and it isn’t important. He neither engaged in the debate nor shamed the woman brought before him. He made the scribes and Pharisees look and wait. Then he asked them to judge themselves first. It’s a good lesson for us all. Before we condemn anyone else, we should look at the ways in which we have sinned. The lesson continues for the woman as she is told to go and sin no more.

As Helen was attentive to Annie, let us be attentive to what Jesus spells out for us. His lessons lead us to new life and the knowledge of God.

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A WORD FROM POPE FRANCIS
“Dialogue is very important for our own maturity, because in confronting another person, confronting other cultures, and also confronting other religions in the right way, we grow; we develop and mature.”

— Address to students and teachers from Japan, August 21, 2013

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