

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT: YEAR C

17TH MARCH 2013

Isaiah 43:16-21

Philippians 3:8-14

John 8:1-11

NO NEED TO RECALL THE PAST

Trust the past to God's mercy, the present to his love, and the future to his providence – St. Augustine.

Sometimes when we recall unpleasant memories and experiences; we encounter feelings of bitterness, regrets, shame and blame. We may even go through depression. There are certain individuals who cannot let go of their unfortunate experiences, problems and +mistakes. There are still others who hold on to the problems inflicted upon them by others and such people fail to forgive and move on with their lives.

The message in today's liturgy is an encouragement to let go of the old way of life and focus on a new way of life that Jesus offers. One aspect that characterizes the message of Lent is the theme of *newness*. The period of Lent focuses on a new way of life. God wants to offer us a new way of life in Christ. We are called upon to open our hearts and allow God to recreate us into new beings.

Today's first reading and the gospel bring out the aspect of letting go of the past and allow ourselves to be recreated. The two readings present an encouragement to all of us that we should not be held captives of our past problems, mistakes and failures. We need to move on in life because God is always in control. God always intervenes and provides a new way of life.

When the people of Israel were in exile in Babylon, they felt humiliated and depressed. They started wondering whether God had abandoned them. They recalled the wonders God did in the past for their forefathers. They asked why God was not doing the same wonders for them. And God reminded them that what He is going to do will be greater than the past wonders. They should not think of the past because He is now going to bring the new exodus. In the first reading God said to the people, "No need to recall the past, no need to think of what was done before. See I am doing a new deed" (Is 43:18-19). God reminded the people of Israel not to regret, feel defeated or humiliated because He would keep on manifesting His love to them.

God is telling us today that we need to focus on the new deed that He is doing for us. Through the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus, God is going to inaugurate new life for us. It is this new life which we should accept, a life which demands love, peace, justice, respect for human life, and reconciliation. During these remaining days towards Easter, we are challenged to bury the past so that we rise with Christ in a new way. The paschal mystery is the new exodus through which we move from sin to freedom and from death to life.

Today's gospel presents an episode of a woman caught in adultery and was condemned by the community but acquitted by Jesus. The Pharisees and the Scribes dragged her before Jesus and demanded that she be sentenced by stoning her to death according to the law. She was full of fear, shame, guilt, anger, loneliness and self-pity. These men had no regard for her, and they couldn't even consider that she was not alone in committing the act of adultery. Where did they place the man in this situation? It takes two to commit the act. This was a clear case of gender bias!

Everyone condemned and despised her for her adulterous act. She might have even condemned and blamed herself. She was going through terrible guilt and shame. She might have regarded herself as a good for nothing person. But Jesus did something that changed her life and her self-image by forgiving her without any condemnation. He simply encouraged her to be good in future. He even challenged her accusers to evaluate their own lives before passing any sentence on her. "If there is anyone of you who has not sinned, let him be the first to throw a stone at her" (Jn 8:7). Instead of condemning her, Jesus became her defender.

It was a liberating experience for her to have met this man who was interested in restoring her life and dignity. She encountered someone who had a different way of looking at sinners. He said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you? ... Neither do I condemn you, go away and don't sin anymore" (Jn 8:11). Those were words of healing which opened a new life for her. Jesus helped her to forget the past and to start a new life of love, joy, and hope. He helped her to be whole and complete again. For her, there was "no need to recall the past, no need to think about what was done before" because Jesus has done a new deed in her life. Jesus opened a new way of life for her.

God is calling us during this Lenten season to a new way of life. He looks at our past and forgives our past as long as we show remorse and repentance. God always leads us to the future with love and compassion. God is encouraging us that we should not walk with sad faces and broken hearts because of our past mistakes and guilt feelings. Our vocation as Christians is to live a joyful and meaningful life. We need to hope for new way of life offered by Jesus. As St. Paul states in the second reading, "All I can say is that I forget the past and I strain ahead for what is still to come...the prize to which God calls us upwards to receive in Christ" (Ph 3:13).

Let us allow Jesus to do what he did for the adulterous woman. We need to present ourselves to Jesus especially through the sacrament of reconciliation so that we could hear him say what he said to the woman: "Neither do I condemn you, go away and don't sin anymore." The experience of this woman should be our own experience especially during this time of Lent. She was dragged to Jesus by the Pharisees and Scribes but we need to drag ourselves to Jesus in the sacrament of reconciliation.

As we approach Easter, Jesus is encouraging us not to be depressed about our past mistakes, problems and failures but we must always try to be good in spite of our weaknesses.

Questions for Reflections

1. Our society is full of people who are regarded as 'outcastes'. These include the prostitutes, street children, victims of HIV/AIDS, prisoners, refugees and people with different political affiliations. What is our attitude towards such people?
2. What burden/s am I carrying from the past that hinder me from developing my relationship with God and other people?

Prayer

We thank you Lord for the gift of life and the gift of each other.

Help us Lord to be always attentive to your voice which is calling us to live a new way of life in the risen Christ.

Grant us your spirit so that we become instruments of your love and mercy. May we hasten to do any good or kindness to any human being. Amen

Practice: Today I will be slow to judge, condemn, and blame others for their wrong doing but quick to encourage them and make them feel accepted.