

Homily of Fifth Sunday of Lent Year C

As we draw nearer to the Holy Week, the readings of today encourage us to confront and free ourselves from whatever keeps us in sin and bondage, so as to welcome new things God is doing.

The first reading is Isaiah's prophecy to the Jewish exiles in Babylon. God was going to do a new thing: to liberate them and return them to their own land. God was going to use Cyrus, king of Persia, who had conquered Babylon to fulfil his plan. Isaiah prophesied God's plan. "See, I am doing something new!" The immediacy of God's plan is reflected in these words, "Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?" Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled as it is written in Ezra 1:2-4, "Thus says Cyrus, king of Persia: 'All the kingdoms of the earth the Lord, the God of heaven, has given to me, and he has charged me to build him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Those among you who belong to any part of his people, may their God be with them! Let them go up to Jerusalem in Judah to build the house of the Lord the God of Israel, that is, the God who is in Jerusalem. Let all those who have survived, in whatever place they may have lived, be assisted by the people of that place with silver, gold, goods, and livestock, together with voluntary offerings for the house of God in Jerusalem.'"

Jesus Christ is the new King Cyrus who has overpowered the Evil One (Nebuchadnezzar) and has set us free. Therefore, we are not to "remember the former things, nor consider things of the old," but to embrace the freedom of new life in Christ. It is in the spirit of such freedom that St. Paul declares in the second reading, "I consider everything as a loss because of the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have accepted the loss of all things and I consider them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him... Just one thing: forgetting what lies behind but straining forward to what lies ahead, I continue my pursuit towards the goal, the prize of God's upward calling, in Christ Jesus."

I consider that this Sunday's readings and reflection are a continuation of the theme of last Sunday's readings and reflection, that is, rise from sin; rise from bondage; rise from enslavement, rise from the events of the past; rise from things of long ago; rise from what lies behind. Go forward to freedom; go forward to something new; go forward to what lies ahead; go forward to new life in Christ. Last Sunday, we read from 2 Corinthians 5: 17, "Whoever is in Christ is a new creation: old things have passed away, behold, new things have come."

The Scribes and the Pharisees had judged and condemned the woman caught in adultery. They were ready to stone her to death. People may accuse, judge, condemn, and want to throw stones. People may write off. One should not let oneself get drowned and submerged in such negativities. One should not give up on oneself. One should not condemn oneself. St. Paul says, "There is, now, no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus" (Roman 8:1). Let us be still before the Lord and wait for his new plan for us, because he has the last say.

The Gospel says, "Jesus bent down and began to write on the ground with his finger." What was Jesus writing? I imagine that Jesus was writing down a new plan for the woman. The Scribes and the Pharisees read the new plan as Jesus was writing and walked away in disappointment. When he finished writing, he read it out to the woman, "Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin anymore." May God's plan for us be very legible in such a way that our detractor can see it and walk away. Amen.

Isaiah prophesied to the Jews as we read in the first reading: "Thus says the Lord, who opens a way in the sea... I am doing something new... In the desert I make a way, in the wasteland, rivers...I put water in the desert and river in the wasteland for my chosen to drink..." Today, this prophecy is for us. May this prophecy be fulfilled in all those in dire need of God's intervention in their 'babylons' and 'condemnations.' Amen.

Fr. Martin Eke, MSP