

Homily of Fifth Sunday of Lent Year C, 2022

Isaiah 43:16-21; Psalm 1-6; Philippians 3:8-14; John 8:1-8

Next Sunday is Palm Sunday. 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 the 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. The prophecy was fulfilled when God used Cyrus, king of Persia, to free the Israelites from the Babylonian captivity (Ezra 1:2-4). Isaiah prophesied God's plan. "Remember not the events of the past, the things of long ago consider not; 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 43:18-19).

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" (Philippians 3:8).

I consider that this Sunday's readings and reflection are a continuation of the theme of last Sunday's readings and reflection. The last Sunday's gospel was about the prodigal son who was able to rise from the severe famine stricken country, and the wretched state he landed himself into and returned to his father. He is an inspiration to many of us to rise from sin; to rise from the events of the past; to rise from things of long ago; to rise from what lies behind; and go forward to freedom; go forward to something new; go forward to what lies ahead; go forward to new life in Christ. What sin, what events of the past, what things of long ago have I clung to? 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. The woman committed adultery with a man. Where was the man? We see this type of 'selective injustice' all around us. Jesus exposed their hypocrisy when he said to them, "Let the one who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her. ... And in response, they went away one by one, beginning with the elders." We see this type of hypocrisy all around us. We see all kinds of prejudice and humiliation against women in many cultures and institutions. Unfortunately, though, some women bring themselves low by the things they do themselves.

Jesus freed the woman by saying to her, "Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin anymore." Jesus Christ is the new King Cyrus who set us free from ourselves, from others, from the world, and from the evil one. "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36). Let us come to him for transformative power.

A story is told of a child who threw his coin into a bottle-neck vase. He put his hand into the vase and picked his coin. Lo and behold, he couldn't bring out his hand. His father came to his aid and tried, but in vain. His father was thinking of breaking the vase but realized that the child's hand cannot come out as long as the child held the coin. The father said to him, "Drop the coin, free your fingers, keep your fingers straight and bring your hand out." The child replied, "No, dad, I can't let go my coin." The father said, "Son, listen to me; let go the coin and free yourself." Many of us are trapped like this child as long as we can't let go!

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 us and in many helpless cases. Amen.

Fr. Martin Eke, MSP