

5th Sunday in Lent, Cycle C
March 21, 2010

Readings: Isaiah 43:16-21; Philippians 3:8-14; John 8:1-11

Forget the Past

Four and a half weeks of Lent behind us. Two weeks more to our celebration of Easter, the greatest of all Christian celebrations. It is a time to put our past behind us and to look to the future. This is the message we hear in our readings this morning.

Through Isaiah the Lord says to us: ***“Remember not the events of the past, the things of long ago consider not; see, I am doing something new!”*** God reminded the Israelites of the wonders He has performed for them, but tells them to look forward to even greater wonders. For us it is fitting that this weekend marks the beginning of spring. It is a time of new growth. We look at our spiritual lives and look for new ways that God is working in us. We are coming to the end of our Lenten journey. We have reflected on the sins of our past life and hopefully we have repented and committed to making changes. And if we have, then these words from the Lord are meant for us. ***“Remember not the events of the past, the things of long ago consider not; see, I am doing something new!”***

And in our second reading, Paul has just reflected on his past life. He remembers how he had been observant to the laws of the Pharisees, and how he had persecuted the followers of Christ believing himself to be righteous by his actions. But now he looks forward. He realizes that his faith in Jesus was a gift from God; that he had not pursued Christ, but it was Christ that pursued him and had taken possession of him. It was through faith that Paul became righteous; a faith that led to actions. St. Paul says that his righteousness: ***“comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God, depending on faith to know him and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by being conformed to his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.”*** St. Paul puts the mistakes of his past behind him, then willingly picks up his cross to follow Christ, because he places his hope in the resurrection of the dead. And this is a pretty good perspective for all of us to take. We all have things in our past that we would like to forget. Things that we wish we could change but we cannot; we cannot change a second of our past. And so we ask for God’s forgiveness in confession and then put our past behind us. Like Paul, we all need to be willing to share in the sufferings of Christ. And we can all place our hope in the future of the resurrection of our bodies on the last day.

Our gospel story is one more reminder to let go of our past which we cannot change and to look to the future where we can and should make changes. The exchange that takes place between Jesus and the woman caught in adultery at the end of the story sums up the love and forgiveness and mercy of Jesus, but it also reminds us that Jesus wants us to correct our ways, to get back on the straight path. He says simply: ***“Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin any more.”***

Lent is a time to recognize our sinfulness, to repent of that sinfulness, ask God’s forgiveness, to make a firm commitment sin no more, and then ***“remember not the events of the past.”***

Lent is a time to remember that we have our faith not because we pursued God, but because He pursued us and has taken possession of us. That it is through our faith that we are righteous, but it is also through our faith that we are called to action, that we are called to accept sufferings and persecutions, to pick up our crosses and follow Christ.

But Lent is also a time to look forward to the victory that Christ won for us through his passion and resurrection. He has opened the gates of heaven for us. He gives us the hope of sharing in His resurrection. Look forward with hope. Do not get stuck in a past you cannot change.

Deacon Joe Hulway