

Reflection Questions

- What patterns, thoughts, or attitudes of the past keep you from experiencing God in the present?
- How do you recognize the spiritual progress you have made?
 - If you struggle with perfectionism, what practices help you find relief from self-righteous criticism, judgment, and unreasonable expectations?
- How are you called to *go* and embrace the *something new* that God is doing within you?

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Sunday Mass Readings This Week

1st Reading: Isaiah 43:16-21

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 126:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 6

2nd Reading: Philippians 3:8-14

Gospel: Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

5th Sunday of Lent



God is much more focused on what we are in the process of becoming than who we were when we were enslaved by our loved one's addiction. Whereas we may get stuck in the shame and darkness of our family's past, God seeks to liberate us from this familiar persecution and deliver us to new life in Him. This is the central theme of our Sunday mass readings this week, beginning with the word of God through the prophet Isaiah:

*Remember not the events of the past,
the things of long ago consider not;
see, I am doing something new!*

An important guiding principle in 12-step recovery is that of spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection. We know the One who is perfect, and we can seek to draw closer to Him one day at a time. Perfectionism can be fertile ground for constant criticism of ourselves and others. With honest self-reflection and fair expectations for ourselves, we can keep our thoughts and attitudes in the present moment where God is always here to meet us.

Saint Paul speaks directly to this notion in our Second Reading:

It is not that I have already taken hold of it or have already attained perfect maturity, but I continue my pursuit in hope that I may possess it, since I have indeed been taken possession of by Christ Jesus. Brothers and sisters, I for my part do not consider myself to have taken possession. Just one thing: forgetting what lies behind but straining forward to what lies ahead, I continue my pursuit toward the goal, the prize of God's upward calling, in Christ Jesus.

Jesus pierces through whatever sense of unworthiness we may feel in order to take possession of us. He goes to great lengths to make this happen, even when others may want to condemn us or those we love. This week's Gospel reading relates our own sense of shame and imprisonment in the past with that of an adulterous woman.

Scribes and Pharisees who had caught her in the act deliver her to Jesus to be publicly shamed and perhaps stoned. His response underscores the healing nature of our fellowship: "Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." This is a directive from Jesus that we must reflect upon as we face the urge to take other people's inventory. It also highlights the connection we may find with each other, knowing that none among us is perfect.

One by one, those that brought forth the adulterous woman retreat, leaving Jesus alone with her:

"Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She replied, "No one, sir." Then Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin any more."

As a result of our encounter with Christ, we are called to *go* and embrace the *something new* that God is doing within us. Admitting we are powerless and in need of His mercy allows us to get beyond perfectionism and the expectations of self-sufficiency which stand in our way of surrendering to His will. There is safety and understanding as we unite together with a common purpose, driven toward self-discovery, hope, and lovingly detaching from outcomes.

Jesus has paid the debt for our trespasses. During Lent, we move closer to the greatest act of love this world has ever seen. Rather than condemning us and those we love for our sins, he was condemned for them. Our Lord knows the burden of unhealthy attachments, addictions, and spiritual shortcomings because He carried their weight up Calvary. He has set us free and invites us to let go of the heavy load we carry.