

Fifth Sunday of Lent



God is much more focused on who we are in this moment than who we were when we were enslaved by sin and addiction. Whereas we may get stuck in the shame and darkness of our 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 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 we seek 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 self-criticism and ultimately return us back to old habits. 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 this Sunday's 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 us condemned. This Sunday'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 delivered 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.”

One by one, they 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.”*

Upon encountering Jesus, we are called to go out and embrace the new creation that He is forming within us. Recognizing we had become powerless over substances and/or behaviors and in need of His mercy allows us to get beyond perfectionism and the expectations of self-sufficiency, both which stand in the way of us surrendering to God’s will.

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 for our sins, He was condemned for them. Our Lord knows the burden of our addictions, compulsions, and unhealthy attachments because He carried their weight up Calvary. He has set us free and invites us to let go of the heavy load of our past.

- What kind of short-term and long-term spiritual progress have you found as a result of your recovery?
- What practices help you find relief from self-criticism, judgment, and unreasonable expectations?
- How is God calling you to accept and embrace something new?

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First Reading: Isaiah 43:16-21

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

Second Reading: Philippians 3:8-14

Gospel: John 8:1-111