

Fifth Sunday of Lent C/2016

The readings of this fifth Sunday of Lent talk about God's mercy and forgiveness. They show us that God is full of compassion toward sinners. They invite us to take advantage of the compassion of God and repent of our sins.

The first reading describes the mercy of God toward Israel and his deep desire to create anew the conditions of life for his people. It shows also that, just as God has accomplished great deeds for Israel in the past, he will do it again for the good of his people. Finally, the text shows that God will bring a complete transformation of the life of his people, of the land and of nature.

What is behind this text is the idea that with God a new future is always possible. There is also the idea that it is not good to live in the past, but rather to turn toward the future and to hope for the best. The last idea is the truth that God can transform everything, even that which is dead, by giving it vitality and a new life.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus saves the adulterous woman from the hands of those who wanted to stone her. First all, the Gospel says that as Jesus was in the temple area and people started coming to him, he sat down and taught them.

After that, the Gospel says that the scribes and Pharisees brought to Jesus a woman caught in the act of adultery and asked him what he thought about it. The Gospel gives also the argument for which her accusers wanted to stone her by referring to the Law of Moses.

Then, the Gospel gives the reaction of Jesus who challenged the accusers by referring to their own faults to the point that they all went away. In the end, the Gospel says that the woman was left alone with Jesus who did not condemn her, but rather invited her to sin no more.

What do we learn from this Gospel? Last week, I talked about the value of God's mercy. Today, I want to talk about the grace of a second chance. Let me start this way: Human life is not always cruel as some like to say, but it is also generous. That is true in many ways in our daily life, but it is also true in the case of this woman that Jesus saved from her potential murderers. He told her, "Neither do I condemn you".

By pronouncing these words, Jesus does not legitimize her misconduct as though what she had done did not matter. No; it was certainly a sin and the Law of Moses was strict about the punishment to give to such misconduct. But, what the Law of Moses did not say was what to do with the men who were with her. As scandalous as it might appear to our modern ears, that was, however the way it was.

While the Law of Moses was strict with such misconduct, Jesus, on the contrary, offers the woman a second chance and the opportunity to repent. Jesus certainly believes that each person has a past, but he does not lock us in our past. That is why, as he believes that we have a past, he also believes that we have a future. In the name of that future, he does not abandon us in our faults and sins. But rather, he offers us a second chance so that we may live, pardoned by God.

If that is true, it means that our past, as bad as it might be, can always be changed by God's mercy. It can become an opportunity for receiving God's grace. After all, God does not want us to die because we are sinners, but rather that we live. For that reason, he forgives us and gives us a second chance.

Unlike God who wants that we live even when we sin, our fellow human beings are merciless and ready to kill, not only with weapons, but very often with words, severe judgments and gossip. But as they do so, they use a double standard.

The double standard is exactly what the Scribes and the Pharisees used in order to condemn the woman. And when Jesus challenged them, they all went away one by one. Why? Because, as they were judging and condemning the woman about the sixth commandment, there was the whole range of the remaining of the commandments they did not themselves respect.

In other words, they were guilty too. While they harshly treated the woman and were looking to stone her, they lightly judged themselves and forgot their own faults. That is called self-justification. Even today self-justification is very present. Some people behave in the same way, as though they were sleeping with God in the same house and he has authorized them to judge others.

By acting as he did, Jesus warns us by telling us that it is hypocritical and dishonest to look only at the sins of others. We better start cleaning up our own house before that of the neighbor. As the psychology of behavior has taught us, most of the time people who delight in accusing others of misconduct and take pleasure in spreading the scandals of others are generally among those who hide their own guilt. And this is a fact that human history has proven to be true in many ways.

However, it does not mean that because God forgives us and gives us a second chance, we have to dwell on our sins or our sinful situation. In truth, God's forgiveness challenges us to get better and to change our life. Anytime we are forgiven, we are challenged to repent and make amends of our sins. For that reason, we have always to remember that while a saint has a past, a sinner has a future, which depends totally on him and on what he can do with God's grace he receives when God forgives him.

With all that in mind, let us walk to the celebration of Easter with a clear vision of what God expects from us. Let us ask God the grace of changing. Let us pray for one another that God may help us to repent of our sins. Let us trust his mercy and forgiveness. Whatever might be our past, let us not forget that God always gives us a second chance so that we may live. God bless you all!

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



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