

Fifth Sunday of Lent C2025

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 us. For that reason, they invite us to trust his mercy and repent of our sins.

The first reading describes the new condition of life that God is about to establish for his people of Israel. It shows that, just as God has accomplished great deeds for Israel in the past, he is capable of repeating them again today. What he is about to do will bring a complete transformation, not only of human life, but of land and nature as well.

What is behind this text is the idea that with God a new future is always possible. Because it is so, his people should not live in the past, but in expectation of the best by looking forward. Another 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 today's Gospel in which 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.

At that moment, the scribes and Pharisees brought to him a woman caught in the act of adultery. They asked Jesus what he thought about it, given that the Law of Moses recommends the stoning of such a woman. By asking such a question, their intention was to put Jesus to test so that they could find some charge to bring against him.

Without answering their question, Jesus bent down and started writing on the ground. But, they harassed him in order to give an answer. Eventually, Jesus challenged them by saying that the one among them who was without sin should be the first to stone the woman.

At these words of Jesus, they all went away one by one to the point that Jesus alone was in the presence of the woman. In the end, when the woman told Jesus that nobody condemned her, Jesus in turn said that he did not condemn her, but she had to stop sinning.

What do we learn from this Gospel? The first thing we learn is about the drama of the double standard. I call double standard a way of judging similar things by using two different measures. In fact, when Jesus challenged the accusers of the woman, they all went away. Why? Because, if we look at the whole range of the Ten Commandments, they could not say that they were without guilt. And yet, it did not prevent them from accusing the woman and wanting her to be stoned.

By acting this way, scribes and Pharisees use a double standard because, while they harshly treated the woman, they lightly judged themselves and forgot their own faults. Jesus warns us by telling us that it is hypocritical and dishonest to look only at the sins of others, because human frailty is common to anyone. Therefore, it would be better to start cleaning up our own house before that of the neighbor.

As the psychology of behavior teaches us, 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 history has proven to be true in many ways. Let us not forget this appeal of the Psalm 90: “If God would keep a record of our sins, who could survive?”

The second thing I want to highlight is about the grace of a second chance. In fact, life is not always cruel as some like to say, but it is also generous. Today’s Gospel shows it clearly in the case of this woman condemned that Jesus saves from his potential murderers. That is why Jesus told her, “Neither do I condemn you”.

By pronouncing these words, Jesus does legitimize her adulterous life as though it was not a sin. On the contrary, Jesus offers her 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 whatsoever.

The consequence of such perception is that our past, as bad as it might be, can always be changed by God’s mercy. After all, God does not want us to die because we are sinners, but what he wants is that we repent and live. Once again, let us listen to psalm 130, “if the Lord could keep the record of our sins, who could survive?”

The appeal behind this psalm is that we understand that when God forgives us, he gives us a second chance, he wants us to change. That is the reason why Jesus told the adulterous woman: “Go, and from now on do not sin any more”.

In that perspective, 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.

Let us pray that God may help us this time of Lent to repent of our sins. Let us trust his mercy and forgiveness. Whatever might be our past, let us not forget that God gives us always a second chance so that we may live. God bless you all!

[Fr Felicien I. Mbala, Homily for 5th Sunday of Lent 2013]

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



Homily Date: April 06, 2025
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Contact: www.mbala.org
Document Name: 20250406homily.pdf