

Fifth Sunday of Lent – April 7, 2019

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

If the story of the Prodigal Son, which we heard last week, is the most powerful Gospel story on forgiveness, and I believe that it is, then what I just read is the account of the most powerful incident during the ministry of Jesus about forgiveness. It is powerful because it addresses the important matter of infidelity to the marriage covenant. It is powerful because of the response that Jesus made: simply scribbling in the sand. It is powerful because of the reminder that is made to the accusers that only one who is free of any guilt could condemn.

✘ In hearing this account it is important to remember that the action of being unfaithful to the covenant of marriage is the sign in the Scriptures of how God's Chosen People treated the relationship with God. Despite God's goodness to them, they had been unfaithful. They had turned to their neighbors, to other religions, to paganism, and abandoned God. They were unfaithful to the commitment of a loving God to them, to God who had acted on their behalf.

The question made to Jesus was what did he have to say about such infidelity. It was not a question, as we can understand John's Gospel, about the infidelity of the woman in question, but about the infidelity in humanity's response to God. In essence, Jesus' response is directed at our unfaithfulness to God's love. The real beauty of this story is that Jesus said

nothing to the woman at this point. He only scribbled in the sand. When the accusers were gone, he tells her simply not to do this again. She was to change her way of life. She was to eliminate this infidelity from her life.

This incident and the response of Jesus sums up the whole direction of Christ's teaching and ministry which is to reconcile us to God. Christ seeks to have all of us realize the depth of God's desire that we be reunited with God, that we be one with God. It is in this way that we gain an understanding of the purpose of our lives and the manner in which we are to live our lives. We are constantly and continuously to reflect in our lives the image of God that we are. We are to realize that the possibility of renewing that relationship with God is always open to us.

God's love, God's forgiveness, persists. We need only to respond to it. Like the woman in the account, no matter what we have done, God will not act to end the relationship between us. Only we can do this, Only we can end the relationship with God if we cut ourselves off from God, if we are unwilling to change, if we are unwilling to repent, if we are unwilling to work to restore the loving relationship with God.

We heard Isaiah the prophet remind us today that whatever has been part of the past in our lives, God is doing something new with us. This is the renewal we prepare to celebrate at Easter, the renewal of the relationship between God and ourselves. St. Paul spoke with confidence as he acknowledged in himself the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus and the change that this has made in his life. Everything of the past that might hold him back was just so much rubbish.

Jesus simply scribbled in the sand when he heard the very human and vengeful judgement made about the woman. More than anything else this reveals the truth of the loving forgiveness available to us from our good and gracious God.