Fifth Sunday of Lent, Year C

Isaiah 43:16-21

Psalm 126

Philippians 3:8-14

John 8:1-11

“The Lord, the Lord had done great things for us; we are filed with joy.” (Psalm 126)

Lent is our opportunity to have a change of heart. Hopefully that is what we are up to. We need to slice through all the fatty tissue of indifference and get past all the scar tissue of sin that cloaks our better selves. In some serious cases we find our hearts are made of stone. Probably not the entirety of our hearts have turned to stone, but if we look closely, there’s probably some calcification going on.

Our Fifth Sunday of Lent gives us encouragement.

There’s a great line in our first reading. “Remember not the events of the past, the things of long ago consider not; see, I am doing something new!” Our God encourages us to bracket out those things that give us heartburn – the lies, the attitude, the selfishness, the stubbornness. God is willing to give us a new start if we are willing to give our hearts a new start.

St. Paul, of all people, was happy to be knocked off his high horse. All the things he did in his past he counts as rubbish. In Jesus he has found a new path, a new way of living in which he wants to grow and mature.

That poor woman in our Gospel. Nothing like a death threat to look for a way out. She found it in her hero, Jesus.

Let’s look at our Gospel story. Jesus was up all night in prayer – being refreshed in being one with his Father in heaven. Early in the morning he goes to the temple. He is surrounded by a crowd of people who want to learn what Jesus had to say.

The religious authorities try to hem in Jesus, so the audience would come to doubt the teaching of Jesus. They try to force him into an answer of yes or no. Jesus ignores their test. He plays in the dust. They persist. Jesus stands up and says, “Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” You could almost see the authorities blush. Jesus ignores them and continues to play in the dust. They leave in embarrassment. Jesus stands and bids the lady to change her ways and take her leave.

Now what can we make of that? During our examination of our consciences during Lent, the accusations of our misbehavior throw stones at us. Brothers and sisters, know that Jesus doesn’t accuse us. He just asks us to go on our way and don’t sin anymore.

If we aren’t sure if we heard Jesus correctly, that Jesus only sees that we want to forget about our past and mature in our living out our true Christian lives, he gives us an assurance – the Sacrament of Reconciliation and Mercy.

As it happens, there is a communal penance service on Monday at Our Lady of Pompeii Church with multiple confessors- confessors who can forgive your sins with the authority of Jesus himself. For your convenience, confessors will be there at 3:00 P.M. and 7:00 P.M. There you will actually hear the words that your sins are forgiven and you can go away a new person.

So on this Fifth Sunday of Lent remember, “Even now, says the Lord, return to me with your whole heart; for I am gracious and merciful” and “The Lord, the Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.”