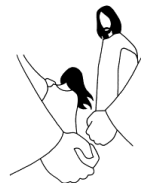




AMDG
FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT
YEAR C
7TH APRIL 2019



**‘Has no one condemned you?
Neither do I condemn you.’**

OPENING PRAYER

By your help, we beseech you, Lord our God,
may we walk eagerly in that same charity
with which, out of love for the world,
your Son handed himself over to death.

Having journeyed through Lent for four weeks, I may well feel in need of the reassuring words of Isaiah (*First Reading*). Just as the Lord promised to give abundant water to sustain the exiles from Babylon on their journey home, he will also guide me through the rest of Lent, supporting me with spiritual food and drink.

In gratitude, I pray the response to the *Psalms*: ‘What marvels the Lord worked for me, indeed I am glad’, recalling the joy of the exiles as they returned to their country.

Paul reminds us that ‘nothing can happen that will outweigh the supreme advantage of knowing Christ Jesus’. He is aware that he needs not try for perfection by his own efforts. I take comfort in this, and forgetting the past, look forward to what is still to come (*Second Reading*).

Jesus defuses a tense and potentially violent situation by forgiving the woman who sinned, and then turning the tables on her accusers: ‘If there is one of you who has not sinned, let him be the first to throw a stone at her’ (*Gospel*). Although he does not condemn her, she is to ‘go away and not sin any more’.

Perhaps this helps me in these last days of Lent to pray to the Lord that he be ‘my Saviour again and renew my joy’. I may also want to pray for all those people around me who still feel in exile, that the expectation of new life at Easter might help them to come home.

SECOND READING PHILIPPIANS 3: 8–14

I believe nothing can happen that will outweigh the supreme advantage of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For him I have accepted the loss of everything, and I look on everything as so much rubbish if only I can have Christ and be given a place in him. I am no longer trying for perfection by my own efforts, the perfection that comes from the Law, but I want only the perfection that comes through faith in Christ. ... All I want is to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and to share his sufferings by reproducing the pattern of his death. That is the way I can hope to take my place in the resurrection of the dead. Not that I have become perfect yet: I have not yet won, but I am still running, trying to capture the prize for which Christ Jesus captured me. I can assure you, my brothers [and sisters], I am far from thinking that I have already won. All I can say is that I forget the past and I strain ahead for what is still to come; I am racing for the finish, for the prize to which God calls us upwards to receive in Christ Jesus.

After coming to some inner quiet in the way I know works best for me – perhaps focusing on my breathing, or on a favourite picture of nature, or on the light of a candle – I slowly read the text.

Perhaps I imagine Paul is talking to me.

I listen, pause, and engage in a conversation with him.

I may have questions to ask him, details which I need to clarify. I take my time.

Then I may want to look at my own life up to this point.

In what ways am I able to agree with Paul?

I bring to mind events which make this possible and give thanks for them.

But there may be a phrase which I find difficult.

If so, I turn to the Lord, always present, silently, at my side.

I ask him to help me understand Paul's words.

If I find myself disagreeing with Paul, I say so, and then turn once more to Jesus, who knows and understands me.

I speak to him simply in my own words, from the heart.

To conclude my prayer, I may like to tell the Lord that I want to know him more clearly, love him more dearly, and follow him more nearly, day by day ... not through my own efforts, but with the help of his love and his grace.

GOSPEL JOHN 8: 1–11

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. At daybreak he appeared in the Temple again; and as all the people came to him, he sat down and began to teach them. The scribes and Pharisees brought a woman along who had been caught committing adultery; and making her stand there in full view of everybody, they said to Jesus, ‘Master, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery, and Moses has ordered us in the Law to condemn women like this to death by stoning. What have you to say?’ They asked him this as a test, looking for something to use against him. But Jesus bent down and started writing on the ground with his finger. As they persisted with their question, he looked up and said, ‘If there is one of you who has not sinned, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.’ Then he bent down and wrote on the ground again. When they heard this they went away one by one, beginning with the eldest, until Jesus was left alone with the woman, who remained standing there. He looked up and said, ‘Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?’ ‘No one, sir,’ she replied. ‘Neither do I condemn you,’ said Jesus ‘go away, and don’t sin any more.’

As I come to my time of prayer, maybe in my favourite place, or wherever I can give a few moments to the Lord, I consider what mood I am in. What am I hoping for today?

I then read the familiar story a few times, and put the text aside.

I spend some time recalling it in as much detail as I can ... the people, their actions, their words, their looks. Is there some element of the story I find strange or surprising? If so, I tell the Lord about it and ask him to enlighten me.

Perhaps I find myself focusing on the woman. I reflect on how she must have felt as the story unfolds. What are my feelings towards her today?

There may have been times in my life when I have been the accuser ... perhaps self-righteous or condemning? With hindsight and the help of the Lord, how would I act now? I ponder, and share what is in my heart with the Lord, trusting that he will hear me and guide me.

Maybe I have come across a similar situation ... perhaps someone in trouble with the law or hounded by the media, who was able to change completely and become once again a valued member of society.

Who or what caused them to change?

I give thanks for them and those who helped them.

Eventually, I conclude my prayer. Slowly, I make a grateful sign of the cross.

Here's a text if you've only got a minute ...

No need to recall the past, no need to think of what was done before. See, I am doing a new deed ... can you not see it?

First Reading

I believe nothing can happen that will outweigh the supreme advantage of knowing Christ Jesus.

Second Reading

Now, now – it is the Lord who speaks – come back to me with all your heart, for I am all tenderness and compassion.

Gospel Acclamation

Has no one condemned you? ... Neither do I condemn you.

Gospel

This week's texts if you want to reflect further

Isaiah 43: 16–21; Psalm 125 (126); Philippians 3: 8–14; John 8: 1–11



If there is one of you who has not sinned, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.



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