

Fifth Sunday of Lent
April 4, 2019
Fr. Rick Lorenz

Reflection

I wonder if you've ever experienced the feeling of having been forgiven? During our parish mission, Fr. Allan reminded us of the parable of the prodigal son. He spent his inheritance in dissolute living, but was welcomed home anyway. He wasn't expecting anything, but hoped to be treated as a servant. He practiced what he would say when he got home: "I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers." But he never got the chance to get these words out. The father "ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him... 'this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found (Lk 15:19-24).'" I had that experience once. I went to military college after high school, but was not a good officer cadet. Marching, inspections, PT: not my strong suit. I never gave up, at least not formally, but they pushed me out after a year. How would I face my dad? He was sure to be disappointed. "I no longer deserve to be called your son." But he never gave me a hard look or a word of reproach. My fears vanished in an instant, and I was home.

In today's gospel, a woman is accused of adultery. I suggest that this accusation struck Jesus close to home. He was without sin, as was his mother. But Mary conceived by the Holy Spirit; something that Joseph did not at first understand; something that his neighbours might not have believed.

Is 43:16-21
Ps 126
Phil 3:8-14
Jn 8:1-11

"Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly (Mt 1:19)." However, the angel told him that, "it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus." The name "Jesus" means "God saves." God would save his people by forgiving their sins through his son (430).

The gospel says that "Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground." He saved the woman from being stoned by writing mysterious words. We presume that he wrote out the sins of the scribes and Pharisees and elders. But they kept on questioning him. So "Jesus straightened up and said to them, 'Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.' And once again Jesus bent down and wrote on the ground." Maybe this time he wrote down how they were forgiven. If that was the case, then listing their sins was not enough. Making them feel guilty: not enough. But if he wrote down who forgave them, then it was the reminder of mercy that caused them to drift away, one by one. Jesus saved the woman, and perhaps forgiveness had one day saved her accusers as well.

Have you ever felt forgiven? It's a rare gift. It's not easy for people to forgive, so it can be hard to feel forgiven. "They lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick."

They remember the pain of past hurt, and it's hard to shake. They also anticipate being hurt again in the future. This is especially true if injustice continues or remains unresolved. But God's forgiveness is different: it is absolute. "Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth...I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert." When we admit our sins and seek conversion, then God's mercy is complete and his joy is great (1847, 545). Our sins are gone, blown away like the dust that Jesus wrote upon in the Temple, blown away by the wind of the Holy Spirit who exhales the steadfast love of God.

Paul knew what it meant to be forgiven, and what to do with it. "...this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal, for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus." For this Eucharist, we pray for the grace to feel forgiven: to accept the mercy of God and the freedom that it brings.