

Fifth Sunday of Lent – March 21, 2010 – Good Shepherd Parish

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 43:16-21

Thus says the LORD, who opens a way in the sea and a path in the mighty waters, who leads out chariots and horsemen, a powerful army, till they lie prostrate together, never to rise, snuffed out and quenched like a wick. Remember not the events of the past, the things of long ago consider not; see, I am doing something new! Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? In the desert I make a way, in the wasteland, rivers. Wild beasts honor me, jackals and ostriches, for I put water in the desert and rivers in the wasteland for my chosen people to drink, the people whom I formed for myself, that they might announce my praise.

Psalm: Ps 126:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 6

R. (3) The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.

When the LORD brought back the captives of Zion,
we were like men dreaming.
Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
and our tongue with rejoicing.

Then they said among the nations,
"The LORD has done great things for them."
The LORD has done great things for us;
we are glad indeed.

Restore our fortunes, O LORD,
like the torrents in the southern desert.
Those that sow in tears
shall reap rejoicing.

Although they go forth weeping,
carrying the seed to be sown,
they shall come back rejoicing,
carrying their sheaves.

Scripture Reading: Philippians 3:8-14

Brothers and sisters: I consider everything as a loss because of the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have accepted the loss of all things and I consider them so much rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having any righteousness of my own based on the law but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God, depending on faith to know him and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by being conformed to his death, if somehow I

may attain the resurrection from the dead. It is not that I have already taken hold of it or have already attained perfect maturity, but I continue my pursuit in hope that I may possess it, since I have indeed been taken possession of by Christ Jesus. Brothers and sisters, I for my part do not consider myself to have taken possession. Just one thing: forgetting what lies behind but straining forward to what lies ahead, I continue my pursuit toward the goal, the prize of God's upward calling, in Christ Jesus.

Gospel: John 8:1-11

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. But early in the morning he arrived again in the temple area, and all the people started coming to him, and he sat down and taught them. Then the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery and made her stand in the middle. They said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?" They said this to test him, so that they could have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and began to write on the ground with his finger. But when they continued asking him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." Again he bent down and wrote on the ground. And in response, they went away one by one, beginning with the elders. So he was left alone with the woman before him. Then Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She replied, "No one, sir." Then Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin any more."



Readings and excerpts from the *Lectionary for Mass* ©1970, 1997, 1998 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., ©1997, 1981, 1968 International Committee on English in the Liturgy, Inc., and ©1964 National Catholic Welfare Conference, Inc. Excerpts from the *Sacramentary* ©1969–1985 ICEL. Excerpts from *Living Liturgy* ©2001 The Order of St. Benedict, Inc. Clip art ©1994, 1996 The Order of St. Benedict, Inc. All rights reserved.

Fifth Sunday of Lent – March 21, 2010 – Good Shepherd Parish

INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.

As you listen to the gospel be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

It is a scene from a nightmare. Yet it turns out well. Pretend you are the woman in Sunday's [Gospel](#). You have been "caught in adultery." The officials shove you into a mob of people. They see your hot shame. It burns. You hear the ancient law of Moses recited by rote. "The sacred law says you must be stoned to death for your crime." *Stoned to death!* For this cause! In addition to the shame! How could things be worse? Someone called the "Teacher" had been captivating the crowd just before you were dragged in. Now it is you. All the attention is on you. The nightmare progresses. Behind all this, the accusers want to trap the Teacher and disgrace him. They are using you for this purpose. Now you see how things could be worse: to be revealed as a mere tool. They question the Teacher. Doesn't he agree that they should stone you to death? They have him in the snare, this dreamer who always preaches about forgiveness and love? If he defends you for the sake of his so-called love, he will break the law of Moses. If he does not defend you, he must pick up a stone and throw it.

The Teacher leans down and scratches absent-minded lines in the dirt. People hold their breath, and the accusers turn nervous. Why is he silent and what will he finally say? Now they themselves begin to feel some shame. The Teacher is lost in thought. Maybe something like this: My Abba has loved each of them through all ages, no matter whether they were sinners or not. "Be my people," Abba has beseeched them. "Love one another. I love you, and I forgive your sins." But look at them. Hatred is their motto, not love. Their love is for death. The accusers shout again. "What is your answer? Follow the law and stone this sinful woman?" You are that woman, and you stand in humiliation, cheeks hot and tears falling. The accusers have it right, your heart says in terror. The teacher lifts his head. He utters a sentence that sums up the Gospel and all Lent. "Let the one among you who is without sin throw the first stone." It is over.

The crowd quietly creeps away, each in their own shame. You stand alone before the quiet Teacher, but your terror has vanished. There is something about him that carries you, brings you out to solid ground. "Well, where are they?" he asks. "Has no one condemned you?" You say, "No one, sir." Maybe he also asks, "Do you condemn yourself?" You spend a long time on this answer, because it is so very hard. Finally you whisper, "I do not want to condemn myself, Teacher." This scene could refashion the whole earth. If we would accept our own sins we could have peace. We would not strike out at others. We would drink in forgiveness from God, who has been there all along, tracing in the sand. We stammer at last, "I believe, Lord, help my unbelief." "Neither do I condemn you," says Jesus. "Go and sin no more."

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. God said, "Remember not the events of the past, the things of long ago consider not; see, I am doing something new!" What was this "something new" God was talking about? What is the "something new" God gives to us in our day? Does he give to you in your own life?
2. St. Paul says in this reading, "forgetting what lies behind." Do you forget what lies behind or do you drive down a highway constantly looking in your rearview mirror, so to speak? Do you "strain forward to see what lies ahead?" What happens to "now" if you are always looking forward or backward?
3. What do you think Jesus was writing on the ground with his finger? Why did the people put down their stones and walk away?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following: Father, help us to be like Christ your Son, who loved the world and died for our salvation. Inspire us by his love, guide us by his example, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen