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5th Sunday of Lent - 3 April 20225 Lent

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3 April 2022

Fifth Sunday of Lent

Reflection by Gerard Moore

Pastoral Note: Fifth Sunday of Lent – Third Scrutiny

by Vincent Glynn

The third scrutiny is celebrated after the homily during which the celebrant is encouraged to explain the meaning of the scrutiny in the light of the Lenten liturgy and to encourage the elect that through the prayer of exorcism ‘their spirit is filled with Christ the Redeemer, who is the resurrection and the life’ as found in the gospel account of Lazarus can be proclaimed on this Sunday (RCIA 130).

In parish communities where there are the elect for the RCIA taking part in the Lenten scrutinies it is pastorally appropriate to read the gospel from Year A.

During this Fifth Week of Lent the elect are also presented with the Lord’s Prayer. The presentation takes place within a Mass celebrated in the presence of a community of faithful (RCIA 165).

Introduction

Our three readings bring us closer to the spirit of Lent, preparing us to celebrate Holy Week and the Sacred Triduum. They remind us of the wonders of God in our midst and of the importance of striving towards them. With this comes a Gospel that stretches us to the depth of God’s forgiveness while giving insight into the meanings of sin itself.

Penitential Act

Use one of the *Roman Missal* texts or this optional litany form:

Lord Jesus, you came to show us your Father’s mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

You came to give hope to the sinner.
Christ, have mercy.

You came to bring salvation to the world.
Lord, have mercy.

The Collect

The oration

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.

Commentary

With the rites for holy week and the celebration of the Triduum drawing near, this collect from the ancient Spanish liturgy invites the faithful to contemplate the self-emptying of Jesus. The theological heart of the prayer is the struggle between death and love. The divine Son challenges the power of death. In this oration 'death' is the result of sin at all levels of life and society. The Christ allows sin and evil to have its way: he suffers abandonment by his leaders, his priests, his people, his friends and is killed by the colonial overmasters. His 'world' betrays him. Yet his love encompasses all reality, the totality of all 'worlds'. It is love that motivates Jesus' willingness to be subject to the forces of death. The prayer's petition is equally confronting. We seek from God to have the same quality and depth of love. We do not seek it begrudgingly, but eagerly. This is an active charity: we 'walk' in the selfsame love of Christ. As we journey, we desire to travel as Christ, effectively countering 'death' where we meet it.

First Reading

Isaiah 43:16-21

The prophet reminds us of the extraordinary wonders that are already being worked before us.

Responsorial Psalm

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

The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.

This is another psalm that is used often in Sunday liturgies. The imagery used by the psalmist calls us to see good in all that happens to us, to be grateful for what God has done and to be a light for the world to see.

Second Reading

Philippians 3:8-14

We pursue the prize of life in Christ, even as Christ has already embraced us.

Gospel Reading

John 8:1-11

The wise prophet Jesus invites religious leaders, hearers and sinners to experience the forgiveness of God, yet few are willing to embrace the largesse of divine love.

Reflection

Our three readings bring us closer to the spirit of Lent, preparing us to celebrate Holy Week and the Sacred Triduum.

The poet Isaiah invites us into an extraordinary play of the imagination. The pivot is found in his verse: “Remember not the events of the past, the things of long ago consider not; see, I am doing something new!” This runs against all the key tenets of Israelite theology, which is built around the theology of remembering the mighty deeds of God as the God of those deeds remains active amongst us today. This theological profundity underpins the Passover rituals and the Last Supper narrative. The prophet springboards from it to a revised position: the wonders of the past are secondary because God is doing even more now. The true wonders are in the present and the immediate future. Now God is doing something new! It is a bold theological stroke, and for our Lenten journey there is a reference here to the Incarnation and Resurrection. Coming as it does in the fifth Sunday of the season, the reading calls us to be refreshed in the salvation that has been achieved in Christ and is being wrought in our time.

In the poem the new memory is not too different from the Exodus memory. It is couched in much the same terms: straight paths, wasteland fed by rivers, water to quench thirst, wild beasts tamed. Here we can open up a Lenten environmental theme. Creation is God’s, all of it works to a purpose whether it be deserts, wilderness, wild beasts, rivers. They do not work to our purpose however, but to God’s purpose. This integrity of creation outside of the uses of human activity has not been so easy for our society to accept. Pope Francis puts it as follows, taking up the words of Patriarch Bartholomew: As Christians, we are also called “to accept the world as a sacrament of communion, as a way of sharing with God and our neighbours on a global scale. It is our humble conviction that the divine and the human meet in the slightest detail in the seamless garment of God’s creation, in the last speck of dust of our planet” (*Laudato Si!* 9)

As the reading from Isaiah prepares us for things new, beyond our former thinking, the passage from Paul focuses our attention onto Christ. This is his pursuit, his goal, to be in Christ Jesus. The sense of pursuit matches our Lenten discipline, with its straining for what lies ahead. Yet what lies ahead is already present. We have been taken into possession by Christ, and our striving is intended to realise what that means and bring it to fruition. The theological backdrop to Paul’s meditation is the Paschal Mystery: to know the power of his resurrection and be conformed to his sufferings. It is a passage well suited to reminding us of the upcoming Holy Week and Triduum, and keep us steady on our Lenten fasting, almsgiving, prayer and good works.

This Gospel is one of the great Jesus stories, and perhaps one of the most controversial. It begins with Jesus coming down from the Mount of Olives. In our Lenten season we know that all too soon he will return to that place! The narrative has an obvious centre piece, but beneath that are fascinating insights into the depth of Jesus, his courage and authority, and the challenge he offered to the early

Christian communities. We will begin with the centre piece in which the woman who is a sinner is accepted by Jesus and forgiven. She is shamed, paraded, humiliated and under the sentence of death. Jesus pronounces a sentence of life and ongoing conversion. The focus of Christian reconciliation is the sinner not the sin. Jesus risks the wrath of the Law, the religious leaders, the hearers, to free the unnamed woman, and he does so within the Temple itself.

This itself is a powerful narrative, but there are further layers to explore. The woman is not the only sinner, nor perhaps the most sinful of the sinners present. The scribes and the pharisees have much to atone for. Their interest is not the Law or justice or the woman. Their intention is to trap Jesus. They craft a devious plan. They test Jesus' fidelity to the Law under three most trying circumstances for the Galilean teacher. They make the test around obedience to the divine Law. They set the test within the grounds of the Temple, the sacred place of the holy commandments. They take his audience of hearers as hostages: these have come to hear a new teaching and they will be forced to see that with Jesus there is nothing too new or extraordinary. Once this level of the story is appreciated, then the poor sinning woman is equivalent to roadkill, a mere casualty in a greater struggle. And it is an uneven struggle, with the Law, the Temple, the symbols of faith and the needs of a people hungry for good news all used against Jesus. This is a clear example of systemic sin, of a systematic use of God's gifts to pervert God's love.

Jesus opts for the poor, shamed, sinful woman, and he loses everything. He takes the risk of love. The religious officials will soon have his death. The Temple and the Law will be witnesses against him. His hearers also desert him: they do not seem to want to take in any more of his teachings. The woman is freed. Scribes, pharisees and hearers had an opportunity to embrace the freedom and reconciliation God offers in Jesus, but only the adulteress takes up the offer.

There is more to this text, a further level of scandal and surprise. Our passage is found in the Gospel of John, but exegetes have been uneasy about this. The style is not Johannine, nor the language. Exegetically it is a set piece that has been placed in the manuscripts of John's Gospel but does not originate there. There is evidence that it was in very early manuscripts of Matthew's Gospel, but it does not remain there. This bouncing around within the textual tradition allows for two thoughts. One is that the story was so controversial for the early Christians that they did not know how to deal with it. It portrays forgiveness that was seen as too easy! Jesus was too forgiving! On the other hand, the narrative was persistently remembered and kept alive within the tradition, finally finding a home within the fourth Gospel. This indicates that as scandalous as it was to the early Christians, it was perhaps an authentic action of Jesus, or so close to Jesus' own actions that it could not be discarded. The early Church did not find all the teachings of Jesus so much to its liking! Just as Jesus challenged the scribes, the pharisees, the hearers and the condemned woman, so he continues to challenge us. We are challenged to forgive; perhaps we are also challenged to recognise and confront systemic sin and systematic wrongdoing. This is a profound Lenten lesson.

Prayer of the Faithful

Introduction

In your goodness Father, you have shown yourself to be full of compassion and love and so we bring to you our petitions for our community and the world.

Petitions

We pray for Pope Francis and all those who have been given the responsibility of leading the Church, both clergy and lay people. May they show through their lives that they are open to the Holy Spirit as they journey towards the Synod of 2023.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for members of the Plenary Council. May they rely on the Holy Spirit to guide them in all their efforts as we move towards the second Assembly.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for the leaders of our world that they will seek justice and peace for all within the context of climate change and the pandemic.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for everyone gathered here, that in this season of Lent they will strive for peace, love and joy within their hearts and extend this to everyone they meet.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those who are living with extreme wealth that they will use their monetary assets to serve the community and help those in need.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those who feel lost and without direction, that they will be guided through the darkness into an understanding of God's presence in their lives.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those suffering in the pandemic and all those frontline workers who care for them. May they be strengthened in their need and bring us all to good health.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

Conclusion

Father, all these petitions have been brought to you by those who love you. Grant them in your love, in the name of your Son Jesus Christ, through the power of the Spirit.

Amen.

Music selections by Alessio Loiacono and Chris deSilva

GA

A new commandment. Unknown/ L Bartlett. 318
Be not afraid. B. Dufford SJ. 449
Bless the Lord my soul. M. Haugen. 84
Create in me. J. O'Brien. 40
Grant to us, O Lord. L Deiss. 303
I heard the voice of Jesus say. H Bonar/ R V Williams. 468
Love divine, all loves excelling. C Wesley/ R Prichard. 463
When I survey the wondrous cross. I Watts/ E Miller. 330
Tree of life. M Haugen. 307
Yes, I shall arise. L. Deiss. 214

AOV1

Be not afraid. B. Dufford SJ. 114
I heard the voice of Jesus say. H Bonar/ R V Williams. 54
In perfect charity. R. De Bruyn. 142

AOV2

Great is thy faithfulness. W M Runyon. 127

CWB

Forgive our sins as we forgive. Rosamund E. Herklots. 680
God of mercy and compassion. Michael Hodgetts. 692
O bless the Lord, my soul. James Montgomery. 757
O Father, I know I can count on your mercy. Kathleen Boschetti MSC. 762
There's a wideness in God's mercy. Frederick William Faber. 838

CWBII

Sunday by Sunday hymn suggestions

Forgive our sins as we forgive. Rosamond E. Herklots. 120
O Father, I know I can count on your mercy. Kathleen T. Boschetti. 122
Hear us, almighty Lord/*Attende Domine*. Tr. Ralph Wright, OSB. 292
Sing praise to the Lord all our days. John Moloney. 602
Additional selections by Chris deSilva
God of mercy and compassion. Edmund Vaughan Csr/Paul Bird Csr. 290
Return to God. Marty Haugen. 298

S&S1

The Lord is kind and merciful. Rick Modlin. 77

S&S2

The Lord is kind and merciful. Tom Booth. 274

Psalms Selected by Chris deSilva and Angela McCarthy

Psalm 125: *The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.*

Psalm 125: Noel Ansell. CWB 177

Psalm 126: The Lord has done great things for us. Noel Ansell. GA

Psalm 126 (125): Jenny O'Brien. JOBC pg. 34

The Lord has done great things for us. Tony Alonso. LPC pg. 8

Music selections by Michael Mangan

Create a new heart (FWS) *Based on Ps 50/51* [Gathering, Gifts, Recessional]

Be with us (FWS) *Based on Ps 90/91* [Gathering, Gifts]

This is the time (TT) [Gathering, Recessional]

Lenten acclamation (TT) [Gospel Acclamation]

Lenten gospel acclamation – Mass Jubilee (MJC) [Gospel Acclamation]

Turn back to God (TT/SYJ) [CHILDREN: Gathering, Recessional]

