

LENT SUN 5-C (Homily 02)
“Live in Christ Through Forgiveness”
(Isaiah 43:16-21; Psalm 126; Phil 3:8-14; John 8:1-11)

An aboriginal legend sets the tone for our reflection on the readings today. An old Grandfather, whose grandson came to him with anger at a schoolmate who had done him an injustice, said, “Let me tell you a story. I too, at times, have felt a great hate for those that have taken so much, with no sorrow for what they do. But hate wears you down, and does not hurt your enemy. It is like taking poison and wishing your enemy would die. I have struggled with these feelings many times.” He continued, “It is as if there are two wolves inside me; one is good and does no harm. He lives in harmony with all around him and does not take offense when no offense was intended. He will only fight when it is right to do so, and in the right way. But the other wolf, ah! He is full of anger. The littlest thing will set him into a fit of temper. He fights everyone, all the time, for no reason. He cannot think because his anger and hate are so great. It is hard to live with these two wolves inside me, for both of them try to dominate my spirit.” The boy looked intently into his Grandfather's eyes and asked, “Which one wins, Grandfather?” The Grandfather solemnly said, “The one I feed.”

The readings today invite us to stop feeding our anger, and instead, to live in Christ and make forgiveness our new way of life.

The first reading today speaks of a new thing, a new creation coming into being. It is as radical as a path through the wilderness; as water in the desert. Praise of God on the part of all creation, and the chosen people, will be part and parcel of this new thing, this new reality.

For those who participate in a traditional First Nations four day fast, which means no food or water for up to 72 hours, that first taste of water is sharp and piercing. That first sip of water is an experiential reminder of our need for water, and in today's context, a harbinger of the reality of this new creation God is bringing about in Jesus.

The Gospel story of the woman caught in adultery provides us with a glimpse of the inner workings of this new creation that God is bringing about in Jesus, not only through his death and resurrection, but already here through a new teaching where forgiveness triumphs over justice and law.

In this famous story, the inadequacy and limitations of law, punishment and shame are exposed. Where is the man that was involved in this sin? Was he not guilty too? Why is only the woman brought forward to be punished?

The dead end of legalism, judgment and patriarchy is gently stated. The elders leave the scene, starting with the oldest, unchanged; unmoved, caught as they are in their lifeless human traditions based on their inadequate interpretation of the Law of Moses and their traditional treatment of women as second class citizens. What is at issue here is the real sin in this story on the part of the Jewish leaders: not so much adultery, but hypocrisy, hardness of heart, the rejection of forgiveness, and unbelief - not believing in Jesus.

For the guilty woman on the other hand, transformation happens through the experience of forgiveness. She experiences the mercy and compassion of Jesus, who refuses to condemn anyone, "Neither do I condemn you," Jesus tells her, "Go and sin no more."

What is revealed here is the newness of life that Jesus came to bring. As God wrote the Law with his finger on Mt. Sinai, so too Jesus, the new Moses at work, writes with his finger – the sign of God's authorship. He writes twice – the sign of God's forgiveness. He writes on the earth – the sign of the universal human condition in need of forgiveness. He refuses to stare at the people – the sign that sins are not held against them. In the end, there is only the woman, and no one to condemn her. There is only love as forgiveness.

The refusal of Jesus to condemn her means there is no condemnation in God, only forgiveness, mercy, compassion and love. In short, there is no killing or violence in this God of Jesus Christ who writes in the dust. That is the message that the world still does not get, as it commits countless acts of violence, as it even blows people up, in the name of religion.

The second reading adds more understanding to this new creation that Jesus brings about. St. Paul tells us that real righteousness, holiness, comes through faith in Jesus and not the Law which cannot give new life.

Paul is adamant – he has experienced both the Law and an encounter with Jesus, and he knows the truth – only the love of God made known through forgiveness gives life. All he wants is to know Christ and the power of his resurrection, the power to give new life. Gaining Christ and being found in

him is the only true treasure worth living for. We are to live in Christ. Our challenge is to be compassionate and forgiving, just like Jesus.

Two young Oblate missionaries once went to visit the late Archbishop Paul Dumouchel OMI in his favourite mission of Patuanak. He greeted them with the news that he had received a letter of complaint about them. The writer of the letter complained that these young missionaries rarely preached about purgatory, hell, sin and the 10 commandments. All they preached about, the writer went on to complain, was love and forgiveness.

The two young priests felt some fear as they wondered what kind of stern admonition they were going to get from the archbishop. To their relief and surprise, the archbishop told them, with a twinkle in his eye, “I have one word of advice for you young missionaries – keep on preaching love and forgiveness!”

The Eucharist that we celebrate now is itself a joyful experience of the compassion, love and forgiveness of God. We are accepted as we are, forgiven and healed, and sent out to spread the Good News of who God is in Jesus – forgiveness, compassion and love.

So let us be like St. Paul, stop feeding our anger, and seek to live in Christ and make forgiveness our new way of life.