

Gratitude Foundation



***“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?
Has only this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?”***

(Lk. 17:15-17)

The Fifth Sunday of Lent — Year C

Fr. Glenn Joseph Theoret
Executive Director

www.gratitudefoundation.us
frglenn@gratitudefoundation.us

3713 County 416 20th Road
Gladstone, MI 49837

“In all things give thanks, it is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”

(1 Thess: 5:18)

Fifth Sunday of Lent - C

Reading I

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.

Responsorial Psalm

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

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

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

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

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

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

Reading II

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.

Verse before the Gospel

Joel 2:12-13

Even now, says the Lord,
return to me with your whole heart;
for I am gracious and merciful.

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.”

Exegesis

Isaiah 43:16-21

Chapter 43 of the *Book of the Prophet Isaiah* referred to by scripture scholars as *Second Isaiah* or *Deutero-Isaiah*. The scenery has shifted from the first 39 chapters as the Israelite People are now in exile. The diaspora, the exile in Babylon has begun. Jerusalem is destroyed and the great temple is a pile of rubble. The leaders of the people are in captivity in Babylon and many of the people are left to scatter, many quite literally in the desert.

The homilist should be aware of this context. This is the beginning of the second great salvation paradigm. Seeking answers for their plight they look to their own sinfulness and how they had strayed from God. Now they are turning towards God and yearning for His saving hand.

Written at the beginning of the Exile, *Deutero-Isaiah* seeks to bring the message of hope to the people. It is titled, *The Book of Consolation*, with our section sub-titled, *The Lord's Glory in Israel's Liberation*. When the author refers to Jerusalem, or Judah, he is referring not to a place but to a people. They are people in need of a Savior.

Chapter 43 is titled *Promises of Redemption and Restoration*. Though it appears that the Exile is ending and the people are being freed, this prophecy is yet to be fulfilled. Our pericope was actually written near the beginning of the Exile. The prophet is looking forward to a new Exodus. He portrays Yahweh as the Holy One who is always about the work of redeeming His beloved people.

Our passage is introduced in verse fourteen as Yahweh turning His focus now on the destruction of the new oppressors of His chosen people, the Babylonians. "Thus says the Lord your redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: For your sakes I send to Babylon; I will lower all the bars, and the Chaldeans shall cry out in lamentation. (Is 43: 14).

Our pericope begins by recalling the saving hand of God in the Exodus, as He opened the Red Sea for His chosen people and returned the water on their oppressor. *But see I am doing something new!* Even at the beginning of the Exile the people are challenged to see the hand of God in the present and to look forward with hope to His saving power. The events will be used to once again show the world the power of God working for those who are faithful to Him.

Exegesis (Continued)

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

Psalm 126 is a very short psalm as it consists of only six verses, all of which are included in our passage this weekend. The psalm is titled *The Reversal of Zion's Fortunes*. Other titles include *A Harvest of Joy* and *A Song of Ascents*. The psalmist is now rejoicing in the fulfillment of the promise of God proclaimed in Psalm 14: "Oh, that from Zion might come the deliverance of Israel, that Jacob may rejoice, and Israel be glad when the Lord restores His people!" (Ps 14:7).

The passage celebrates the Lord who chooses to deliver His people once again from bondage. It is filled with joy and praise to God for His powerful saving hand. They are reminded of the tears that they shed as they were carried off into captivity as Jerusalem was destroyed and the temple demolished. It is the promise of tears being turned into joy. Yahweh will lead them as he led them through the desert once before. He will lead them to brooks of water as He once brought forth water from the rock during the Exodus.

The psalmist is celebrating the fulfillment of the prophesy of Jeremiah. Tears of sorrow are turned into tears of joy as the Israelites are set free from the bond of Babylon. The people are set free to rebuild their lives, their city and their temple. The city remains in ashes as it was burned to the ground. The temple is nothing more than a pile of rubble. A daunting task lies before them.

Their thanksgiving and rejoicing turns to prayer as they turn to God to restore their fortunes. Only God can restore the dry stream beds of the Negeb. The people are carrying sacks of seed and bundles of sheaves to begin the work of sowing such that with the hand of God new life will spring forth. They see God's mighty hand in their redemption but also are keenly aware of their role in the restoration of the Promised Land.

Exegesis (Continued)

Philippians 3:8-14

Philippi was a flourishing town in the Roman province of Macedonia. It is situated on a busy road, the Via Egnatia, linking the Adriatic and Aegean Seas. The city lacked a Jewish synagogue. There was a very small Jewish community there so Paul's community was predominantly Gentile. The community was established by Paul during his second missionary journey. It was the first community established in Europe. (See Acts 19:9-40).

After the standard greeting Paul begins: "I give thanks to my God at every remembrance of you, praying always with joy in my every prayer for all of you..." (Ph 1:4). Paul quite often begins with gratitude to God for the faith that he saw in the early church communities.

Chapter 3 is titled *Loss of all to Gain Christ*. St. Paul begins Chapter 3 as follows: "Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. The expression of joy flows throughout the *Letter to the Philippians*, e.g., (1:18, 25; 2:2, 17, 18, 28, 29; 3:1; 4: 1, 4, 10). Joy comes from the Holy Spirit. It is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit that was breathed upon the apostles by the Risen Lord in the Upper Room that first Easter Sunday and breathed upon the Church at Pentecost.

Paul is encouraging his community and us to seek righteousness that comes from God, not from our own actions. Righteousness in the OT is summed up in Deuteronomy: "Therefore the Lord commanded us to observe all these statutes in fear of the Lord, our God... and our justice before the Lord, (righteousness), our God, is to consist in carefully observing all these commandments He has enjoined on us." (Deut 6: 24-25).

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, and righteousness from God depending on faith, to know Him... Righteousness and faith are about being in a personal relationship with Christ. It is about knowing Him on a personal level. It is about a shared life with Christ and in Christ.

Christ Jesus had made me His own. The Lord took possession of Paul on the Road to Damascus: "But the Lord said to him (Ananias), "Go for this man is a chosen instrument of Mine to carry My name to the Gentiles..." (Acts 9:15). Paul sees this as an act of freewill on his part. "I for my part do not consider myself to have taken possession."

I continue my pursuit toward the goal. Paul sees faith as an endurance race. He uses words like perseverance and straining forward, terms that are often used by athletes in pursuit of a goal, the ultimate finish line, eternal life with Christ.

Exegesis (Continued)

John 8:1-11

For centuries scholars have debated whether the story of *The Woman Caught in Adultery* is a part of the original authentic Johannine manuscript. It seems more Lukan in presentation and content. All agree that the story was a part of written material withing the early Church. Some believe that it should be included in the Gospel of Luke. In any event it is presented here in the Divinely Inspired Cannon of Scripture. Regardless of which Gospel reveals the story, it remains one of the great stories of mercy and forgiveness in Sacred Scripture.

The verse that precedes our passage today is as follows: “They (the crowd) went separately to their one homes.” We open with verse one, “But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.”

This movement of Jesus up the mountain to pray is a theme that is presented often in Luke’s Gospel. This detail in John’s Gospel is deeply significant. The Prophet Ezekiel had a vision of the glory of God leaving the temple because of the sins of the people. “The glory of the Lord left the threshold of the temple and rested upon the cherubim... And the glory of the Lord rose from the city and took a stand on the mountain which is east of the city.” (Is 10: 18, 23). The mountain to the east of the city is Mount of Olives.

The people had dispersed to their homes. Jesus’ home is the temple. Now the glory of God is seen returning via the same route that it left, coming down the Mount of Olives and entering the temple once again.

The woman caught in adultery represents all sinful humanity. Scripture speaks often of our God who desires to betroth His beloved people. The image of sinful humanity as an adulterous person is also revealed in Scripture. “Give your love to a woman beloved of paramour, an adulteress; even as the Lord loves the people of Israel, though they turn to other gods.” (Hos 3:1). The only person without sin in the gathering of Scribes and Pharisees and the crowd of people was Jesus.

Scholars have speculated for centuries what Jesus wrote in the sand that day. All one can do is speculate. It does seem to mirror the action of God writing on the stone tablets with His finger, also twice. “When the Lord had finished speaking to Moses on Mount Sinai, He gave him the two tablets of the commandments, the stone tablets inscribed by God’s own finger.” (Ex 31: 18). Moses came down the mountain only to find an adulterous people worship the god Baal. He shattered the stone tablets on the ground. God always writes twice, however. Moses returned to the Mountain of God and “The Lord said to Moses, ‘Cut two stone tablets like the former, that I may write on them the commandments which were on the former tablets that you broke.’” (Ex 34: 1).

By law the person or persons who caught the woman in the act of adultery were to throw the first stone and then the entire crowd was obliged to follow suit. One by one, beginning with the elders, the crowd dispersed. Presumably Jesus is standing alone now with the woman. Regarding this reality St. Augustine once wrote: “Only two remain, the wretched woman and the incarnation of mercy.”¹

Jesus addressed her as “woman.” “Woman” was an endearing address to a female. Recall that Jesus, from the Cross, referred to His own mother as “woman.” She in turn addresses Jesus as Lord, *Kyrios* in the original Greek. I am not sure why our translation is *Sir*?

The glory of God has returned to the temple in the person of Jesus the Lord. The glory of God comes in the form of love and mercy and forgiveness. We must wonder how the woman lived the rest of her life, not only corporeal life but eternal life. We must also wonder if those that dropped their stones would pick them up again.

1. Augustine of Hippo; *In Iohannis Evangelium* 33:5; CCSL XXXVI; 309.

Reflection

Last weekend in my reflection I talked about how the Prodigal Son became a new creation in the arms of his loving father. As he experienced a love and a mercy beyond his ability to comprehend his heart had to melt. Rembrandt beautifully portrays this in his famous painting, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*. The head of the son appears to be as a newborn baby symbolizing the new birth that he experiences in the embrace of his father. I have always wondered how the young son lived the rest of his life.

So many of the parables of Jesus are open ended causing us to put ourselves into the story and reflect on how we would respond. This is the direction that our readings for this weekend are challenging us to contemplate. In our first reading the Prophet Isaiah recalls the Exodus experience but refers to it as a present reality. “The Lord opens the way in the sea and a path in the mighty waters... Remember not the events of the past... see I am doing something new!” In a similar way our Psalm recalls the delivery of the people from the Exile in Babylon and calls us to be filled with joy as we are currently being set free. St Paul in our second reading talks about “straining forward to what lies ahead... toward the goal... to be in Christ Jesus. In today’s Gospel the woman caught in adultery stands condemned to death by stoning and Jesus sets her free. I wonder how she lived the rest of her life.

Jesus confronts the crowd and says, “Let the one who is without sin cast the first stone.” Then he bends down and writes in the sand with His finger. Many speculate that he may have been writing the sins of each of the members of the crowd. Aware that He knew their sins, one by one they dropped the stones that they were holding in their hands, and they walked away leaving Jesus alone face to face with the woman. Know that each one of us will be in that position one day, face to face with Jesus. Jesus sets her free and tells her to go and sin no more. The others all left. She stayed with Jesus.

Although the crowd dispersed, their anger and hatred did not. The fury of the crowd simply turns from the woman and is now focused on Jesus. I find it interesting that during the scene that we call the *Agony in the Garden* we are told that Jesus departs from them “about a stone’s throw away.” Is it because Jesus is taking the woman’s place? Is that not what Jesus does as He picks up His cross? He takes our place as he dies for our sins. So, the question becomes for us, “How do we respond to this gift of salvation? How are we going to live the rest of our lives? Are we living our lives filled with faith, hope, love and joy as we should? Or are we going to carry stones ready to throw at others? Remember today is the first day of the rest of your life here on earth!

Come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of us Your faithful and enkindle in us the fire of Your love. Amen.

Yours in Christ,



Personal Witness

In my early thirties, during my wandering years in the desert, I was searching for more. A priest friend introduced me to some popular Christian books by Fr. John Powell, a Jesuit priest out of the Chicago area. The first two books that I read were *Fully Human, Fully Alive* and *The Christian Vision*. I found them very inciteful. One line captured me and has remained with me to this day. He wrote: “Fear not that you might die, fear that you may never really live.”

At that moment I realized that I was not really living, I was merely existing, going through the motions of life. I was deeply engaged in my professional life as a Certified Public Accountant. My work had become my life. I was involved with a group of partners that were young and ambitious. Together we had built a rather large regional CPA Firm with multiple offices in two states. It became all consuming. It was only during the divestiture process years later that I realized that all the material goods that I thought I owned actually owned me! I had become a slave to the world that I had created, and I was merely going through the day-to-day activities of life. I was existing and not really living.

I attended a Lenten Parish Mission at my parish during the early days of my search. Two Franciscan priests of the same order as St. Maximilian Kolbe, were preaching the three-night event. During the first session one of them told the story of Fr. Kolbe in gruesome detail. He was the man who took of place of Franciszek Gajowniczek in the starvation bunker at Auschwitz on July 31, 1941. Fueled by the desire that Fr. Kolbe’s life not be given in vain motivated Franciszek to miraculously survive Auschwitz and later Sachsenhausen. “Even more, I wanted to live so that Father Kolbe’s sacrifice wouldn’t be in vain,” he said years after the war. “I protected myself twice as hard. That’s how he saved me a second time. He gave me strength — I think from heaven. How could I waste his life? He offered it so I could live with my wife and enjoy my sons.” In one of his testimonials, Franciszek said that he thanked God and Fr. Maximillian Kolbe every day for the gift of life. Franciszek was reunited with his wife after the war and lived to the age of ninety-three.

When the missionary priest completed the story he pointed to the large Crucifix over the high altar, and while looking directly at me, he said, “Jesus took your place. He died for your sins so that you might live. How are you going to live the rest of your life?” I fell to my knees, from my sitting position, and thanked Jesus. For the first time in my life, the Cross became personal. I was instantly filled with gratitude. It was something I had taken for granted for the first thirty-three years of my life. That moment changed me forever. Never again could I look at a Crucifix without feeling a profound sense of gratitude.

Like Mr. Gajowniczek I too have felt a deeper drive to attain my own salvation, lest Jesus die for me in vain. Jesus said, “I came so that you might have life and have life to the fullest.” Those words now motivate me to strive for the fullness of life, to live life more abundantly in Christ Jesus my Lord! To this end I continue to become a Spirit filled, Spirit led, and a Spirit giving person.

