

Readings

Is 43:16-21

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

Phil 3:8-14

Jn 8:1-11

Arthur P. Purcaro, O.S.A.
Villanova University
Villanova, Pennsylvania

How's your memory?

Today's Scripture readings seem to indicate that God has a very bad memory. And how good that is for us!

The prophet Isaiah tells us God encouraged the Israelites: Remember not the events of the past, the things of long ago consider not; see, I am doing something new! And Paul urges us to forget what lies behind, but strain forward to what lies ahead.

God does not dwell on our faults and failings but forgives us and encourages us to take the next possible step in our growth in holiness.

Those who are enthused about or interested in something new, generally, are those dissatisfied with the current situation. In many cases, they are those who have been left out, excluded, not taken into account. These are the ones thought less of, treated differently, who are longing from the depths of their heart for something new, better, different. The newness spoken of in today's readings is much more than a replacement of what has worn out. It is a spectacular newness, a newness beyond compare.

In today's Gospel passage, Jesus saw a lonely, frightened woman, manipulated by cruel, self-righteous men for their own sinister ends. Jesus perceived the potential for something new and he encouraged and welcomed it.

The scribes and Pharisees, on the other hand, are mean-spirited; they intend on using the woman caught in adultery, not considering her humanity, her shame, her dignity. For them she was an object, a pawn, rather than a person. We take note of Jesus' reaction to their dreadful behavior: he does not hate them, nor wish them dead or eliminated from the face of the earth. Jesus does not humiliate them, nor the woman herself, but rather loves them, invites them to recognize their own limitations and seek their common commitment to be truly free again, as free as we were all created to be: free of arrogance, of the desire for vengeance, of self-justification and self-promotion.

Jesus sees them and the woman they have victimized as persons, inviting them to recognize our common humanity, our destiny to be the image and likeness of a loving, forgiving, caring God. Jesus takes them where they are and seeks something new for them, inviting them to become more fully human, more caring, more truly like God.

The invitation of Jesus to "let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her" is made not only to the Pharisees and scribes, or to the woman they have accused, but also to us. To us, who recognize that we have failed to care for and respect our common humanity and our common home. We have adulterated God's plan of harmony and interdependence.

Too often we are guilty of the fundamental sin of the garden – hubris. We appropriate what God has gifted for everyone, leaving out so many others meant to benefit as well from God's bounty. We see the consequences of this sin in the propagation of untruths and misinformation, in violent imposition of self-serving practices and in their effects on our planet itself.

Selfishness and pride are causing the dismantling of the beautiful world of God's creation, of which we are not masters but co-responsible carers. This will continue to deteriorate unless each of us personally, and all of us as a society, accept the challenge pronounced by Pope Francis to "care for our common home."

We will find a great deal of happiness and peace in our lives if we can truly grasp the attitude of God who condemns the sin but loves the sinner, forgiving and encouraging growth.