

[Readings: Isaiah 43:16-21; Ps. 126; Phil. 3:8-14; John 8:1-11]

The theme for today's homily could be: "I Saw What You Did and I Know Who You Are!" Because all three readings today focus on our sinful past. Isaiah has been lamenting the infidelity of the people of Israel who continued to sin and turn away from the Lord and are now in exile. There seems to be no hope for those who stubbornly and deliberately refuse to turn back to the Lord and follow His commands. In spite of this, at this point in our First Reading passage, Isaiah gives a message of hope for that faithful remnant left behind in Jerusalem, in captivity in Babylon and for those who have not been faithful to God anywhere.

The key words of his message today are, "Remember not the events of the past, the things of long ago, consider not." How many times do we play the same tapes over and over in our heads? You know which ones I mean. Not the ones of happier times and loving moments, but those tapes that remind us of our mistakes, our shortcomings, our sins and our weakness? Isaiah says, "He knows what you did, and He knows who you are," but then Isaiah says, "And He wants to forgive you and for you to forgive yourself."

It takes a lot of energy to harbor resentment, bitterness and regret, both against others and more importantly against ourselves. It keeps us from being healthy and whole. Isaiah says, let it go. As the Lord has forgiven you and forgotten your iniquities, so you must do for yourself and for one another.

Now, let's listen to the words of St. Paul. A fanatical Jew who took his religion VERY seriously! Serious enough that he would arbitrarily break into houses of Christian believers and have them removed, tortured and killed while he watched. Can you imagine the field day St. Paul would have if he played THOSE tapes over and over? He probably would have driven himself insane.

Instead, he says, "By the grace of God, I am what I am, and His grace in me has not been in vain." God knows what we did, and God knows who we are. ***"But by the grace of God, I am what I am, and His grace in me has not been in vain."*** I would ask that you remember these words this week. "By the grace

of God, I am what I am, and God's grace in me has not been in vain."

St. Paul admits that because of his conversion, his year-long retreat with St. Peter and the other Christians, his newfound fervor in preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ, all of his past life (before Christ) is loss and rubbish. The only thing that matters to him is where he is now -- in the power that comes with Jesus Christ and His Resurrection.

What else do you and I need, if we are in a right relationship with Jesus Christ? St. Paul also admits that he has not yet "attained perfect maturity." None of us can make that claim until we are six feet under, and even then, maybe not. Jesus Christ still has so much to work on in St. Paul, who says that he forgets what lies behind and strains forward to what lies ahead. This is a great philosophy of life for you and for me: forgive what lies behind and move forward.

Come to confession this Friday at 7 PM. There will be many priests on hand to offer you God's compassion, forgiveness and reconciliation. If it has been a while since you have been to confession, consider this as my personal invitation to you to come and be reconciled with the Lord, the Church, yourself.

Then we come to that curious scene from today's Gospel. There is an old joke used in the seminary about this scene, when Jesus says, "Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." There is silence for a moment. And then one solitary woman throws a stone with all her might and bops the adulterous woman square on the head. Jesus rolls his eyes and throws his arms up in the air and says, "Mother, will you PLEASE stay out of this?" Then Jesus bends down and begins scribbling in the dirt.

What is He writing? Could it be simply, "God saw what you did!" and then after challenging those who think they are sinless, He continues writing, "And He knows who you are and where you live!" Another theory suggests that Jesus wrote the personal, private sin of each person who gazed upon His writing. What would YOUR reaction be if that one secret sin that nobody knows about suddenly appears in the sand for all the world to see?

A third theory is a more positive one. It suggests that Jesus writes, "This woman is a child of God. You are a child of God. Why are you doing this to your sister?" And one by one, everyone realizes that they are NOT without sin and leave, BEGINNING WITH THE ELDERS! That was a tremendous statement made by the crowd. That those who are the most skilled in the law are the first to admit their sinfulness. That was an act of humility, humiliation and shame.

What are the compassionate words of Jesus to this woman? "Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin anymore." Stop playing the negative tapes. Start playing the positive ones. Live in the present and prepare for the future. Saints are sinners with a past, sinners are saints with a future!  
AMEN!