

7th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle B

Note: Where a Scripture text is underlined in the body of this discussion, it is recommended that the reader look up and read that passage.

1st Reading - Isaiah 43:18-19, 21-22, 24b-25

In this portion of Isaiah, the prophet writes of the exile which Israel and Judah will undergo (Israel in 722 B.C. and Judah in 605-586 B.C.) because they have been an unfaithful bride to God. All mankind will witness this exile because the kingdom of God is at hand and the poor and lowly, rather than the Davidic family, will have the most prominent places in it. Every divine promise is on the point of fulfillment because God is just.

Before the exile Israel was relatively prosperous, overly self-confident, and very material-minded. Isaiah sees that the people will be discouraged, dazed and even destitute while in exile. Because of this, they must be consoled rather than punished, their faith must be sustained rather than tried. He sees Abraham as the rock upon which all future ages may look for example and the exodus from Egypt as an ever-continuing act of salvation for his people. He looks to this time and writes to bolster the faith of the people in their time of need.

18 Remember not the events of the past, the things of long ago consider not;

Although Isaiah is devoted to the acts of the past, the people must not glory in past events which have no application to the present situation.

19 See, I am doing something new! Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?

Are you blind? Don't you see what is going on? Just like the exodus of years ago, the way is being prepared.

In the desert I make a way, in the wasteland, rivers. ²¹ The people whom I formed for myself, that they might announce my praise.

They are God's Chosen People (Deuteronomy 4:20).

²² Yet you did not call upon me, O Jacob, for you grew weary of me, O Israel. ^{24b} you burdened me with your sins, and wearied me with your crimes. ²⁵ It is I, I, who wipe out, for my own sake, your offenses; your sins I remember no more.

God's people have been ungrateful and even neglectful but even these transgressions are met with divine mercy. Israel is in exile because they became engrossed in their own affairs and turned away from their covenant relationship with God. Now that they are in exile,

they call upon Him to redeem them. God, in His divine mercy, will forgive them because they are His chosen ones and He will always be faithful to His covenant with them. The key to this reading is that Israel wearied of God and wandered away but now they make Him weary (literally, making God their servant) with their complaints. How many of us today forget about God in our every day dealings with each other and only turn to Him to bail us out when we have gotten everything so messed up that it will take a miracle to straighten it out?

2nd Reading - 2 Corinthians 1:18-22

Today we begin our study of Saint Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. According to the letter itself (2:12-13; 7:5-7; 8:1-15; 9:2) Saint Paul composed this letter in Macedonia after leaving Ephesus. This would place the date of composition most likely in the autumn of A.D. 57. Saint Paul had spent eighteen months establishing the church in Corinth and is now distressed by the misunderstanding and evil-doing of some of his beloved Corinthian people; yet he is also pleased when he can praise them in any way.

It appears that the Corinthian people have been influenced by missionaries from Palestine. These missionaries regard themselves as supermen, heavenly men, the seed of Abraham, Hebrews par excellence. They think that they have the power to make others supermen like themselves. They seem to think of Christ as the supreme example of the heavenly man, despising His humanity. His death made no difference because He was just as "heavenly" before His death as after it. They seem to have no use for suffering or sacrifice, regarding their own success and wealth as a proof of their power as missionaries.

18 As God is faithful, our word to you is not "yes" and "no."

He has not spoken to them in an inconsistent or deceitful manner; he has always been a man of his word.

19 For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was proclaimed to you by us, Silvanus and Timothy and me, was not "yes" and "no," but "yes" has been in him.

Saint Paul could not be inconsistent or deceitful because Jesus was absolute truth.

20 For however many are the promises of God, their Yes is in him;

This denotes an action that has happened and continues in its effect; the divine promises were fulfilled in the person of Jesus the Christ, and we are still affected by the results of His life.

"Paul's preaching promised many things. He talked about being raised to life again and of being taken up into heaven. He talked about incorruption and those great rewards which

awaited them. These promises abide unchanging ... they are always true." [Saint John Chrysostom (A.D. 392), *Homilies on 2 Corinthians* 3,4]

therefore, the Amen from us also goes through him to God for glory.

"Amen" means "so be it, yes." Christ is faithful, His answer is always "Yes" to the Father and He is the model for all Christians. It is through reliance on Christ's faithfulness that they are able to adhere fully to the teachings of the apostle.

21 But the one who gives us security with you in Christ and who anointed us is God; 22 he has also put his seal upon us and given the Spirit in our hearts

Saint Paul relates the three effects of our initiation into the Christian life at baptism: He has anointed us, He has placed His personal mark upon our soul (we no longer belong to ourselves but have become the property of Christ), and together with grace He has given us the Holy Spirit to guide us. These are the promises of the Blessed Trinity: It is the Father who has anointed us, establishing us in the Son, through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

as a first installment.

The fullest possession of messianic bounty is yet to come, but we have the Spirit dwelling within us which is the guarantee of the rewards which await us in the eternal life. In commenting on this passage, in A.D. 392, Saint John Chrysostom explains that by this action the Holy Spirit establishes the Christian as prophet, priest and king: "In olden times these three types of people received the unction which confirmed them in their dignity. We Christians have not one of these three dignities but all three, pre-eminently. For, are we not kings, who shall infallibly inherit a kingdom? Are we not priests, if we offer our bodies as a sacrifice, instead of mere animal victims, as the Apostle says: 'I appeal to you . . . to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God' (Romans 12:1)? And are we not constituted prophets, if, thanks to God, secrets have been revealed to us which eye has not seen nor ear heard?" (*Homily on 2 Corinthians*, 3).

Gospel - Mark 2:1-12

Jesus has just begun His public ministry. He is in Galilee and has already come to the attention of the scribes and Pharisees who begin to oppose Him. In our reading today we find several indicators of Jesus' divine nature: He forgives sins, He can read the human heart, and He has the power to heal physical illness instantly.

2:1 When Jesus returned to Capernaum after some days, it became known that he was at home.

Capernaum had become the "home base" from which Jesus' Galilean ministry was

conducted.

² Many gathered together so that there was no longer room for them, not even around the door, and he preached the word to them. ³ They came bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. ⁴ Unable to get near Jesus because of the crowd, they opened up the roof above him.

Many Jewish homes had a terraced roof which was accessible by steps at the back.

After they had broken through, they let down the mat on which the paralytic was lying. ⁵ When Jesus saw their faith,

Faith is an essential prerequisite for a miracle. Since this event occurs very early in Jesus' public ministry, it does not necessarily mean belief in Jesus as a divine person. During the period of Jesus' ministry, and before His resurrection, it would more likely have meant a receptivity to God's healing word as proclaimed by Jesus, together with abandonment of self reliance and instead dependence upon God's saving power which was being exercised in and through Jesus; this was the Jewish understanding of the meaning of "belief." Here, the friends are acting as intercessors for the paralytic, who is helped by their merits. In this man's physical paralysis Saint Jerome sees a type or figure of spiritual paralysis: the cripple was unable to return to God by his own efforts. Jesus, God and man, cured him of both kinds of paralysis.

he said to the paralytic, "Child, your sins are forgiven."

Jesus' words to the paralytic reflect the fact that his pardon involves a personal encounter with Christ; the same personal encounter which occurs in the sacrament of penance.

"In their ministry of the forgiveness of sin, pastors do not exercise the right of some independent power. For not in their own name but in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit do they forgive sins. They ask; the Godhead forgives. The service is enabled by humans, but the gift comes from the Power on High." [Saint Ambrose of Milan (A.D. 381), *The Holy Spirit*, 3,18,137].

⁶ Now some of the scribes were sitting there asking themselves, ⁷ "Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming. Who but God alone can forgive sins?"

As Saint Irenaeus of Lyons, writing between A.D. 180 and 199, says "How can sins be rightly remitted unless the very One against whom one has sinned grants the pardon?" (*Against Heresies* 5,17). The scribes know that only God can forgive sins, this is why they take issue with Jesus' statement "your sins are forgiven." Their statement is a foreshadowing of the condemnation of Mark 14:60-64.

⁸ Jesus immediately knew in his mind what they were thinking to themselves,

Jesus, because He is God incarnate, has the ability to read the human heart.

so he said, “Why are you thinking such things in your hearts? ⁹ Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, pick up your mat and walk’? ¹⁰ But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins on earth”--

The scribes require a sign to prove the truth of what Jesus says, so He offers them this sign. Affliction was seen as a punishment for sin. They will not be able to deny that the paralytic has been cured and thus they will not be able to reasonably deny that the paralytic also has been forgiven his sins.

¹¹ he said to the paralytic, “I say to you, rise, pick up your mat, and go home.” ¹² He rose, picked up his mat at once, and went away in the sight of everyone. They were all astounded and glorified God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this.”

The amazed people fail to see the miracle as a sign of Jesus’ power to forgive sins. How many miracles do we fail to recognize in our lives?