

Forgetting the Past

It is important to remember the past lest we repeat past mistakes. But there are times when we need to set the past aside lest it distract us from what God is doing in our lives now.

For example, in today's first reading, God tells the people of Israel, "Remember *not* the events of the past" because God is doing something new in their midst. God is performing a new work of salvation for their benefit, and if they dwell on the past they will not see what God is doing for them.

In today's second reading, Paul tells us how he set aside the past so that he could know Christ. Formerly he sought to establish his own holiness before God by his own efforts. But when God revealed his Son to him, Paul suddenly realized that God had given him the gift of holiness in his Son Jesus Christ. And so Paul set aside the gains of his past life so that he could know the gift of God in Jesus Christ.

Finally, in today's gospel Jesus meets a woman who desperately needs to set aside her past. Her past had been marked by an adulterous relationship that her accusers would not let her forget. But Jesus does not condemn her, nor does he remind her of her past. Instead, he offers her the gift of forgiveness. And so it is time for her to set the past aside so that she can embrace the new thing God is doing for her in Jesus Christ.

There are times when we dwell on the past in a morbid way. For example, we remember the way that others have hurt us, and we keep a grudge. Or we remember some particular sin, and we think that we are beyond God's mercy and forgiveness. But today's liturgy reminds that God is doing something new for us in Jesus Christ. God is bringing about a new act of salvation that can change and transform our lives. And so there are times when we must set the past aside so that we can embrace the new thing that God is doing in our lives.

We have now entered the fifth week of Lent, and next week will be Holy Week. Throughout this Lenten Season we have been preparing for the great events of Holy Week by more frequent and devout prayer, by works of charity for the good and benefit of others, and by fasting and sacrifice so that we can master those things that would lead us away from Christ. Now is the time to set aside the past so that we can embrace the new thing God is doing for us in Christ.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is a powerful way in which we can set aside the past and embrace the gift of salvation God offers us in Christ. Through this sacrament we confess our sins and acknowledge our need for the forgiveness that only God can extend to us in Jesus Christ. Through this sacrament we, like the woman of today's gospel, meet the merciful and forgiving Christ. Through this sacrament we experience the new thing God is doing for us in Christ.

This is the acceptable time to embrace the peace and reconciliation God offers us in Christ. This Monday and next Monday you can receive the Sacrament at any Catholic Church in the Archdiocese of Hartford from 6:00 to 7:00 PM. If necessary, we will hear confessions longer than that.

Father Matera