

5th Sunday of Lent C



Neither do I condemn you.

Go away, and don't sin any more. (Jn 8:11)

First Reading

Isaiah 43:16-21

Thus says the Lord, who made a way through the sea, a path in the great waters; who put chariots and horse in the field and a powerful army, which lay there never to rise again, snuffed out, put out like a wick:

No need to recall the past, no need to think about what was done before. See, I am doing a new deed, even now it comes to light; can you not see it? Yes, I am making a road in the wilderness, paths in the wilds.

The wild beasts will honour me, jackals and ostriches, because I am putting water in the wilderness (rivers in the wild) to give my chosen people drink. The people I have formed for myself will sing my praises.

Second Reading

Philippians 3:8-14

I believe nothing can happen that will outweigh the supreme advantage of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For him I have accepted the loss of everything, and I look on everything as so much rubbish if only I can have Christ and be given a place in him. I am no longer trying for perfection by my own efforts, the perfection that comes from the Law, but I want only the perfection that comes through faith in Christ, and is from God and based on faith. All I want is to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and to share his sufferings by reproducing the pattern of his death. That is the way I can hope to take my place in the resurrection of the dead. Not that I have become perfect yet: I have not yet won, but I am still running, trying to capture the prize for which Christ Jesus captured me. I can assure you my brothers and sisters, I am far from thinking that I have already won. All I can say is that I forget the past and I strain ahead for what is still to come; I am racing for the finish, for the prize to which God calls us upwards to receive in Christ Jesus.

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. At daybreak he appeared in the Temple again; and as all the people came to him, he sat down and began to teach them.

The scribes and Pharisees brought a woman along who had been caught committing adultery; and making her stand there in full view of everybody, they said to Jesus, "Master, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery, and Moses has ordered us in the Law to condemn women like this to death by stoning. What have you to say?" They asked him this as a test, looking for something to use against him. But Jesus bent down and started writing on the ground with his finger. As they persisted with their question, he looked up and said, "If there is one of you who has not sinned, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." Then he bent down and wrote on the ground again. When they heard this they went away one by one, beginning with the eldest, until Jesus was left alone with the woman, who remained standing there. He looked up and said, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir," she replied. "Neither do I condemn you," said Jesus "go away, and don't sin any more."

Meditation

Once again the scribes and Pharisees set a trap for Jesus in order to discredit him. Because it is placed just before Palm Sunday, this account may be seen as a first episode in the litigation against Jesus. If he absolves this woman caught in the act of adultery, they will accuse him of belittling the Law of Moses. If he condemns her, that will put an end to his reputation of mercy toward sinners.

Jesus shows himself a wise judge. He knows the human heart. He knows that there is no one "on earth so just as to do good and never sin" (Qo 7:20). The Son of Man came to save what was lost. To the accusers who press him to pronounce judgment, he gives no reply. He forces them to examine their own hearts, "Let the man among you who has no sin be the first to cast a stone at her."

Now any condemnation of this woman, no matter how zealous for the law, becomes completely irrelevant. Who would dare to claim to be without blame? The woman is not abandoned to the death due her sin but invited to rebuild her own life. Jesus' word sets her free and opens to her a new future.