



CONTRIBUTED BY FATHER PAUL S. VOISIN, C.R.

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FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

March 13, 2016

Gathering Time (10 - 15 minutes)

Introduction to the Word:

Some years ago, I used to watch a television program called 'You Only Live Twice'. In each episode, a person, at the moment of their death, was given an opportunity to go back in time and change the course of their life. They did not go back as themselves, but as another person, to influence their life, to make a decision that could and would change their life. I remember one particular episode in which a woman was hit by a garbage truck, as she was distracted crossing the street. She had just come from her doctor, who told her that she had lung cancer, and had only a short time to live. She went back in time as the guidance counselor of her high school. There, she—the guidance counselor—had herself—the student—suspended from the basketball team for smoking. The mother of the student, also a heavy smoker, came in to tell her that she was dying of lung cancer. Instead of worrying her children with the truth, she told them that she was off for a few days to a spa, when actually she was in the hospital having chemotherapy. The guidance counselor was shocked, as her mother had never revealed that before her death. She brought the two of them together—her mother and herself, as a teenager—and finally the mother revealed to her daughter that she was dying of lung cancer. Through their tears, they each promised never to smoke again. Then the episode jumps to the future, and because the daughter had stopped smoking she got home at the normal time, not having to go to the doctor's office. When she returned to her husband and children, she was surprised to hear the voice of her mother, who had survived and was living with them. Her life, and that of her mother, had been changed by 'Living Twice'.

Warm-Up Activity:

I am sure that we would all like to 'live twice', both physically and spiritually. We all seek a second chance. The adulterous woman in the gospel today was given a second chance by Jesus, "to go and sin no more". Our Lenten journey is all about creating something new in us, by our

faithful listening to the Lord's call to conversion, and moving our heart towards doing the will of God.

- What is our first reaction to the 'living twice' of the adulterous woman? And to the woman in 'You Only Live Twice'?
- In the past, how have you had an experience of 'living twice' in your relationship with God, or with another?
- During this Lenten season, how have you heard the Lord say "Go and sin no more"?

Table of the Word

No one in our world likes to be judged, especially as the next step is usually seen as being condemnation. In our politically correct world, this complicates life, including Christian life, because there are attitudes, activities, things and people that we must look at through the eyes of Jesus, and recognize that some are to be encouraged, and others discouraged. Sin does exist. We cannot close our eyes to evil, or pretend that whatever one wants to do is beyond reproach. There is such a thing as right and wrong, and the challenge of each and every follower of Jesus is to avoid the wrong and evil, and embrace the right and good. The Lenten season is a particular time in which we confront evil and sin, and through the mercy and forgiveness of God we have a second (or one hundredth!) chance. God is judge, but he is also merciful and just.

Penitential Rite

Leader: Let us turn to the God of mercy and love:
Lord Jesus, you know our human weakness and send us your grace
Christ Jesus, you enlighten us to choose good and what is right
Lord Jesus, your light reveals to us evil and what is wrong

Lord, have mercy
Christ, have mercy
Lord, have mercy

Let us pray: (together)

By your help, we beseech you, Lord our God,
may we walk eagerly in that same charity
with which, out of love for the world,
your Son, Jesus, handed himself over to death.
His death, and resurrection, have given us
the opportunity to be transformed
by the new life that he has won for us.
May we embrace that new life in our Lenten journey.
This we ask through that same Jesus, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God forever and ever.
Amen.

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION TIME

(As Christians we believe that the **WORD** of God we hear proclaimed each Sunday is an empowering Word, and that God is present in the Word proclaimed. This is the Word that God wants us to hear today. The dynamic of the Small Christian Community, namely, reflecting on our life story within the context of this Word, and sharing the insights of these reflections, is such that God's Spirit becomes present, and the gifts of the Spirit are experienced as empowering and life-giving.)

First Reading (Isaiah 43:16-21)

Thus says the Lord, who opens a way in the sea and a path in the mighty waters, who leads out chariots and horsemen, a powerful army, till they lie prostrate together, never to rise, snuffed out and quenched like a wick. Remember not the events of the past, the things of long ago consider not; see, I am doing something new! Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? In the desert I make a way, in the wasteland, rivers. Wild beasts honor me, jackals and ostriches, for I put water in the desert and rivers in the wasteland for my chosen people to drink, the people whom I formed for myself, that they might announce my praise.

The Word of the Lord Thanks be to God.

Second Reading (Philippians 3:8-14)

Brothers and sisters: I consider everything as loss because of the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have accepted the loss of all things and I consider them so much rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having any righteousness of my own based on the law but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God, depending on faith to know him and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by being confirmed to his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. It is not that I have already taken hold of it or have already attained perfect maturity, but I continue my pursuit in hope that I may possess it, since I have indeed been taken possession of by Christ Jesus. Brothers and sisters, I for my part do not consider myself to have taken possession. Just one thing: forgetting what lies behind but straining forward to what lies ahead, I continue my pursuit toward the goal, the prize of God's upward calling, in Christ Jesus.

The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God

Gospel (John 8:1-11)

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. But early in the morning he arrived again in the temple area, and all the people started coming to him, and he sat down and taught them. Then the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been in adultery and made her stand in the middle. They said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?" They said this to test him, so that they could have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and began to write on the ground with his finger. But when they continued asking him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." Again he bent down and wrote on the ground. And in response, they went away one by one, beginning with the elders. So he was left alone with the woman before him. Then Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She

replied, "No one, sir". Then Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin anymore."

The Gospel of the Lord. Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ

Lectio Divina means "sacred prayer." It was a popular form of prayer in the early Church. This Word proclaimed today is God's own Word, God's way of speaking to you today through his own Spirit. So take a few moments to be quiet, allowing this Word you have just heard to touch you as you reflect quietly on the three readings. Is there a word or thought that somehow attracts you or has your interest? If so, simply identify it—no need to explain it—just identify it.

Commentary:

Isaiah, the prophet, reminds the people of God of the mysterious and benevolent working of God. He refers to the passage through the Red Sea, freeing them from slavery in Egypt, but which is but a foretaste of what is to come. God promises to "make something new". He introduces images of water—sacred in the desert life—as a sign of his blessing and care. God was with his people. This was 'good news' for the people of God, the chosen ones.

The moving words of St. Paul show his depth of faith, and his ability to articulate this life with and in Jesus that has transformed him from persecutor to apostle. This conversion has turned his world upside down. The values and goals he once set for himself are now "rubbish", not worth anything. In Christ his values and goals have been transformed to reflect the grace of God. The resurrection of Jesus has become the source of new life for him here and now, and the key to eternal life. The virtue most associated with the resurrection is hope, and Paul is filled with hope as he looks to the future.

Our dramatic gospel is at the heart of the Lenten message—God forgives when we are contrite, and we go away to avoid sin in the future. By the Law of Moses the people had every right to bring this woman before the chief priests or temple officials. In this case, they brought her to Jesus, recognizing him as a wise teacher and preacher. It seems their condemnation is 'pent up', looking for a scapegoat, perhaps for their own sins that would remain in secret, and not paraded before the crowds, as in the case of the adulterous woman. The stillness of Jesus, I am sure, frustrated her accusers. His words went right to the heart of the accusers as he said, "Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." How interesting that it was the oldest who were the first to leave—those more aware of their own faults and failings. How easy it is to judge and condemn others! When it is our face that is held up to the mirror we are not as quick to judge and condemn.

Allow about 5 – 10 minutes for the participants to share their thoughts on the Commentary.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

1. *"I am doing something new"* (Isaiah 43:16-21)
God brings new life to those who cooperate with his grace. This was his promise to his people, and now to us—his people of the new covenant.

- a) What "something new" has the Lord done in you this Lent, through your observance of this season of grace?
 - b) With the beautiful imagery of water, bringing life to the desert, how in your life has the Lord accomplished this giving of new life?
 - c) How have you praised God for his generosity and graciousness?
2. *"To know Christ and the power of his resurrection"* (Philippians 3:8-14)
St. Paul experienced tremendous changes in his life—to his very core. His life was not only renewed, but transformed.
- a) How have you experienced the power of the resurrection in your life?
 - b) What is the goal that you are pursuing in union with Christ?
 - c) In following Christ, what "rubbish" have you left behind?
3. *"From now on do not sin anymore"* (John 8:1-11)
No one would like to find themselves in the position of the adulterous woman, paraded before others and convicted of their sin.
- a) How can we relate to the sentiments of the crowd—self-righteousness and being judgmental?
 - b) How long would it have taken us to be among "the first to leave", recognizing our own sin?
 - c) What are some of the victories that we have experienced over our sin?

Caring-Praying Time:

1. **Word for the Week** *"Go and sin no more"* (John 8:11)

2. **Suggestion for the Week:**

Our Lenten journey is coming to an end. If we have taken it seriously, and heeded the Lord's call to conversion, we can recognize the 'distance' we have covered. But, there is still a time ahead of us, to complete this journey, or if we have not taken Lent seriously, to try to do as much as we can in the time that remains.

Use this week to reflect on these 'second chances' that God has given to us. Let us be filled with gratitude. But let us continue to struggle with THE sin, fault or bad habit that has been our 'target' during this Lenten season of 2016. Perhaps it is not a 'new' struggle, but something so deep within us that it continues to resurface. In your prayer and reflection, put yourself in the place of the adulterous woman who walked away forgiven of her sin—to sin no more.

3. **Intercessions:** (response: Lord, hear our prayer)

That the remaining days of this Lenten season may be ones of grace and renewal for us, we pray ...

That we may reflect the mercy of God when confronted by the sins of others, we pray ...

That, in humility, we may confess our sins and make firm resolution to "sin no more", we pray ...

That we may be aware of God's forgiveness and mercy in our lives, and this may fill us with gratitude, we pray ...

That we may allow God to "do something new" in us, through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we pray ...

And how can we help you in prayer this week?

Let us pray

(together)

O Risen Lord,
the Way, the Truth, and the Life,
make us faithful followers of
the Spirit that raised you up to new life.
Grant that we may be inwardly renewed,
dying to ourselves so that you may live in us.
May our lives serve as signs
of the transforming power of your love.
Use us as your instruments
for the renewal of society,
bringing your life and love to all,
and leading them to your Church.
This we ask of you, Lord Jesus,
living and reigning with the Father,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God forever.

With hand and hearts united in gratitude for God's favours on us today, we pray that all those in our influence be moved to be open to your Word and your Spirit, while we pray as one,

OUR FATHER ...

Celebrating the Word: A Ministry of the Congregation of the Resurrection Ontario-Kentucky Province (including the former Resurrection Centre), 265 Westmount Road North, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada N2L 3G7. (Celebrating the Word was founded by Father Frank Ruetz, C.R., deceased 2012). For information: Toll Free: 1-877-242-7935. website: www.resurrectionists.ca E-mail: theword@resurrectionists.ca

The Scripture version used in this commentary is the New Revised Standard Version (copyrighted by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA)