

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Mar 13th 2016

There is something about starting over. A new page. A new year. A new week. That feeling that the past is the past. I like to think that people who have messed up in some way get a second chance, and that they learn from their mistakes.

That concept of starting over flows through today's readings. In the first reading from Isaiah, we hear "Remember not the events of the past, the things of long ago consider not; see, I am doing something new." And in the second reading, "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."

We have that second and third and infinite number of chances when we seek God's love. We stray off the path, but we can always find it again. That is so powerful and, I think, difficult for us to grasp. We feel we have to do something to earn love or that by our mistakes; we have made ourselves unworthy.

We find it hard to let go of the past, our resentments and grudges. We feel unworthy because we are human and make mistakes; we give in to the temptations that surround us. When we turn to God, we can become that clean slate. We can ask forgiveness and be forgiven.

The parable in John's gospel is one of my own favorites. I wish I could have been there to see the scribes and the Pharisees who thought they had a "gotcha" moment. "Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her," Jesus tells them, as this poor woman stands there. Jesus goes back to tracing patterns in the dirt as the Pharisees and scribes melt away. Jesus does not condemn the woman either as he tells her to go and sin no more.

In my own world, when I feel judgmental of others, I need to remember that powerful phrase. I can strive to start over, to know that God will welcome me as I am. I can try to live that way in my own life. I can remember the verse before the Gospel where God says: "Return to me with your whole heart, for I am gracious and merciful." I pray that I return to God every day, every hour with a whole heart.

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