

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent Year C - 2007 Is 43:16-41 Jn 8:1-11

1. It is a part of almost every American political campaign.
  - a. In the last two presidential elections, it solidified the republican base and won crucial votes for the president.
  - b. And while many would contend that it has been used and manipulated by the Republicans, in reality politicians of every political persuasion have appealed to it over the years to win us over.
    - i. It isn't the war in Iraq, nor the war on Terror
    - ii. It isn't abortion or gay marriage
    - iii. It isn't any one of the hot button issues that so dominate our political debates
    - iv. It is simply - the past.
2. It is the past which politicians have used to win votes and solidify their base
3. It is the past which people have used to encourage fight against both terror and the war on it
4. It is the past that looms large in the minds of judges who must decide on who gets to live and die, who gets married and who doesn't
5. For think about it;
  - a. how do we make decisions on what to do in the present, without our past experience?
  - b. How do we make judicial decisions without appeal to precedent?
6. In fact it is the past which we inevitably remember
  - a. as simpler and safer; more peaceful and moral,
    - i. that guides our decision-making in all aspects of our life.  
(1) Precisely because so often we yearn to return to it.
7. And it is why the past is so important to politicians and policy makers; because if they can promise to return our families, our morals, our neighborhoods our cities our nation our church our world to the past we remember,
  - a. They will almost certainly win the future.
8. But the past is not only important to us as Americans;
  - a. it is vitally important to us as believers; especially as Catholics;
  - b. It is behind the whole sale rejection of anything modern in some churches
  - c. it is behind the clinging to Latin and lace,
  - d. The rejection of modern music in favor of medieval modes,
  - e. the insistence on the "thee"s and "thou"s, the "mankind"s and the "my brethren"s of old fashioned English.
  - f. it is the excuse given for the inability to revisit settled doctrinal questions -
    - i. and of course, to question moral norms.
9. The past is vitally important to us
  - a. because we believe exactly what the people of Israel believed;
  - b. we know who we are in the present, and who we will be in the future, is by looking at the past.
  - c. That is why the prophet says what he says in this evening/morning's first reading.

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- i. For he was speaking at a very difficult time for God's people.
  - ii. Judah had been attacked, Jerusalem destroyed, and the people of Judah had been forced into exile in Babylon.
    - (1) They had to follow Babylonian customs, worship Babylonian Gods.
    - (2) One of the only ways they retained any knowledge of who they were as God's people was to remember that event so long ago when God split the Red sea and saved the people of Israel.
- 10. And yet even while the prophet acknowledges this,
  - a. What he really wants to do is expose the fatal flaw in all their reasoning.
  - b. Because if all we know of who God is, is what God has done in the past. . .
    - i. what if God wants to do something new?
- 11. What if, instead of saving his people, like he did on the shores of the Red Sea, instead God let them be destroyed by Babylon carted off into exile, so that they might be saved again, this time not by God splitting the Red Sea, but by driving a highway through the desert, so that they might return to the promised land?
- 12. The only way they would know that this was God's doing,
  - a. was NOT by looking at the past,
  - b. but by looking for what is new.
- 13. New is what God is doing in the first reading;
- 14. new is what Jesus is doing in the Gospel;
  - a. For according to the law adultery was a sin;
  - b. according to tradition, the punishment for that sin was death by stoning.
  - c. And according to the pharisees this is what this woman deserved;
    - i. And because of this, they were sure of what God would do,
    - ii. but what would Jesus do?
- 15. What Jesus did was challenge their understanding of the law, their tradition and their God
  - a. NOT by challenging idea that people should be faithful in marriage,
  - b. but by challenging the ways in which fidelity should be interpreted, and protected.
    - i. Adultery should be dealt with
      - (1) not by defending the offended honor of husband and destroying his damaged property (the woman),
      - (2) but by recognizing that whether we are man or woman, all of us are capable of sin,
      - (3) and thus all stand equally in need not of judgement but of forgiveness and the chance to begin again.
        - (a) That was new for them - as it often is for us.
- 16. That God is by definition the one who does what is new is revolutionary.
  - a. Many would reject this understanding of God out of hand -
  - b. but to do so would be to forget what is one of the most central aspects of the Week we are about to celebrate;
    - i. that the disciples didn't greet the crucifixion with joy,

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- (1) as the fulfilment of what they have always believed;
  - ii. they believed that Jesus would reign as a king on Palm Sunday
    - (1) not die as a criminal on Good Friday.
  - iii. and on Easter Sunday, the women went to the tomb to bury Jesus,
    - (1) not to witness his rising.
- 17. They did not expect the resurrection;
  - a. Why? Because it was God doing what God always does, according to the prophet, and according to Jesus - something new.
- 18. We live in a world which many would agree is threatened, not aided by what is old;
  - a. We live in communities that are divided,
  - b. families that are divided
  - c. a church, a nation, a world that are divided
    - i. by old hatreds, old judgments, old prejudices old memories.
- 19. It is little wonder we cannot escape the legacy of this past,
  - a. since really we always seem to return to it;
  - b. thinking that that is the only place we will find ourselves and our God.
  - c. But is not the only place; not according to the prophet, nor according to Jesus; and thus not according to God.
    - i. Because the only people who found God according to them are those who don't look to the tried and true laws and traditions of the past
    - ii. But instead look to
      - (1) where things are changing like the Prophet of the first reading did;
      - (2) where people are challenging old certainties and formulas like Jesus did;
        - (a) not to reject them but so that we might live them more fully and be more faithful to their deepest truth.
- 20. I don't know about you; but such talk scares me;
  - a. for I am threatened by the thought that it is precisely what is new, and changing in our lives, our neighborhood, our church, and in our world that is the place where God is and where God continues to speak to us. but not God;
    - i. because that is what God is and that is what God does; what is new.
- 21. So let me ask you this fifth Sunday of Lent:
  - a. Where are you being challenged?
  - b. Where are you changing?
  - c. What is new in your life?
  - d. If you are looking for God this Lent; start there.