

REFLECTION FOR THE 5th SUNDAY OF LENT

We continue our Lenten journey today and we are invited to look at Jesus and learn about God's love from him. Today's readings insist on this theme of the Lord's mercy. In the first reading, we have the prophet Isaiah who, accompanying the people of Israel in their exile from Babylon, sows hope in the hearts of the exiles. They felt discouraged, wondering where the God of their fathers was, the God who had promised Abraham to make his descendants a great people; the God who had freed the people from slavery in Egypt; the God who had promised David that his house would remain forever. It seemed that God had forgotten these promises. However, Isaiah appeals to the people's faith, announcing times of liberation when a new people will emerge and proclaim the wonders of the Lord. A new exodus will take place.

Many times, we too feel discouraged, wondering where is God? The God who allows violence, wars, and the suffering of innocent people to happen! ***However, God is with us***, he walks with us. Let us allow hope to dwell in our hearts from the certainty that we have God by our side.

In the second reading, St. Paul affirms his trust in Jesus Christ. For him, says the Apostle, he renounced all things, considering everything as rubbish, and making Christ his only treasure. His concern is to identify with Christ in his own sufferings, thereby to reach the goal: the resurrection with Jesus Christ and eternal life. This invitation is also made to each one of us. We too must make Christ the center of our existence, carrying our daily cross with him, aiming for full life in God, eternal life. Our life, as Paul tells us, is like a race, in which we must be prepared and persistent. Press on without discouragement, to reach the goal that Christ promises his faithful disciples: life, and life in abundance.

In turn, in the Gospel, we find another episode in which Jesus Christ affirms that God wants mercy and not sacrifices. God has a heart of forgiveness and mercy and wants to show his love to everyone. He wants everyone to turn to him from the heart, being merciful just as the Father in heaven is merciful. A woman caught in adultery is brought to Jesus. According to the Law, this woman should be condemned to death by stoning. They presented the situation to Jesus to see what he would say. It seemed like a situation in which Jesus would be criticized for having a dog and for not having a dog. If he said yes to following the Law, he would be accused of having no compassion; if he said no, he would be accused of not following God's Law. Jesus does not say yes or no, he just bends down and writes on the ground, making the woman's accusers nervous and they insist on

questioning the Master. Then Jesus challenged them: “*Let him who is without sin among you be the first to cast a stone at her.*”

No one dared to throw the first stone, but they left one by one, leaving the woman alone with Jesus. He turned to the woman: “*Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you? No one, Lord,*” replied the woman. Jesus answered, “*Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on, sin no more.*”

The Lord did not come to condemn, but to forgive. He came to announce to us the Good News of peace and forgiveness. God is a Father always waiting for his children to return to his arms, to his home. Only love can break the circle of violence, hatred, and oppression. Let us also open our hearts to mercy and forgiveness. Let us pray: sweet heart of Jesus, make my heart meek, humble, and merciful like yours.

Amen.