

Our readings today are very appropriate as we head into Lent
They give us a chance to take a look at our relationship with God
To see where we stand
To see how we are responding to his invitation
To see where we might be suffering
Where sin might even be paralyzing our spirit
What do you think of when you think of sin?
What is your impression of how God looks at it?
I think a lot of us picture God as a scorekeeper
He is sitting up there
Watching all of us
A ledger in his hand
We get marks on the plus side when we come to Mass
When we do something nice for another person
When we receive the Eucharist in a worthy manner
Baptism is worth a bunch of points
Then on the other side are the bad things we do
Big sins
Little sins
Maybe some are worth more points than the others
And so it goes
Until we die and come face to face with God

Then he will pull out this big book

Open it up

Get out the calculator

And if our totals are in the black

Heaven

If we are in the red

Hell

If we are in the margin of error

Purgatory

All black and white, nice and neat

But is it real?

I think our readings today show a different approach

Israel was a very special people in God's eyes

They were His chosen ones

He chose them in Abraham

When they were held in slavery

He freed them from the Egyptians

He protected them and fed them in the wilderness

Bringing them into a land filled with milk and honey

Their way of worship reflected all of this

Their identity was rooted in what God did for their ancestors

**In a certain way, their liturgical celebrations were more than a
recollection**

They had a way of making them present again

So what God did for their ancestors long ago

He was doing for them in the present

This confidence in God's protection often led them astray

The would take Him for granted

Thinking whatever they did would not matter

They were God's chosen ones

He would not abandon them

And they would stray

Seeking after false gods

Betraying their heritage

Then Isaiah comes along with a new message

Remember not your past

The Lord says; see I am doing something new

God desires to accomplish a new creation

He wants to transform his people

He says: It is I who wipe out your offenses

FOR MY OWN SAKE

Your offenses, your sins I remember no more

God is not doing these things for our sake

It is for His own sake

Our conversion is not a matter of no consequence to God

He desires it

When we look at our relationship with God

We see the benefits of that relationship to us

How it affects our hearts, our lives

But do we ever think about how important it is to God

How important I am to God?

How much He desires me to be in a right relationship with Him?

To be in this right relationship

We can't find ourselves saying one thing and doing another

We have to listen to the words of St Paul

God is trustworthy

He is faithful to His promises

He seals us with His Spirit

This seal of the Holy Spirit marks us as belonging to God

And it is a guarantee of future blessings

In response to this gift, God desires our 'yes'

He desires us to belong to Him

With all our heart and soul

He desires to do for us what he gave the paralytic

He desires to free us from spiritual paralysis

He desires to free us from our sins

And when we have been freed

We are called to follow Christ in a new way

Saying yes to the invitation he puts before us

Wherever it might take us

So as we begin preparing for Lent

We see God desires that we let go of the past

So He can do something new in our hearts

For His sake

We do this first by recognizing His call

His invitation to a new life

And we respond 'yes'

Following the Holy Spirit

Confident that where He leads us is where He wants us to be

And the first step in this is by coming to him for forgiveness

To hear his words:

Your sins are forgiven

These words are for us personally

But they are for the community as well

We all have a personal relationship with God

But we are part of a communal relationship as well

We are called to live so our faith is visible

As the 4 who brought the paralytic to Christ

When Christ saw their faith

He said to the paralytic

Your sins are forgiven

We are called to bring others to Christ

Not to block them as the Pharisees do

We are called to love our brothers and sisters

We do that by helping them

Not by condemning them

Inviting them to come to Mass

Even if they cannot come to Communion

Helping them return to confession

If we are Godparents

Are we involved in the faith life of our children?

If we are Confirmation sponsors

Are we supporting our candidates?

Are we challenging our children?

No matter how old or young they may be

Helping them in the practice of their faith

These are difficult conversations

And it helps us to be in that right relationship first

So we can walk with others as God seeks them

Helping them hear his invitation

To see that this is not about a check list

It is not about a balance sheet of grace and sin

It is about living the life we are created for

Living the life of grace

Letting God into our hearts

Saying 'yes'

So He can do something new in us

Something we would never dare to dream

A life only God would dare to dream

For his sake