

## **Homily For Tuesday of the Second Week of Lent - Year I**

### **St Peter's 8:30am Mass - Tuesday, March 2, 2021**

**Isaiah 1:10~31** "Make yourself clean. Avoid evil. Learn to do good. Redemption is by justice and repentance."

**Psalm 50:8~23** "You thought I was one like yourself, but I rebuke you."

**Matthew 23:1-12** "You have one teacher , one Father in heaven and one Instructor, the Messiah."

### **Though Your Sins Be Scarlet**

#### **Introduction**

Sometimes there is a desire and an effort to change the Sacred Scriptures to suit how people want to live, rather than accept the proper relationship between God and humanity described on every page of the Bible. I have a proposal for how we could revise the first Chapter of the Book of Genesis. You can tell me whether you think this is ridiculous or not: "In the beginning, on the sixth day, humankind said: "Let us make God in our image, according to our likeness. So humankind created God in his image, in the image of himself he created God.

#### **Psalm**

There are many harsh reprimands in today's readings, but the one that jumped out at me is a small line from the psalm: "You thought that I was one just like yourself." Just before going into the list of sins and their remedies, I wonder if the psalmist has hit on the heart of the problem for us. We are always tending to make ourselves the standard and demanding that God be like us and kind of go along with how we see things.

Psalm 50 is a warning to avoid hypocrisy and empty ritual before God. It suggests a courtroom, with God as the Judge. There are two accusations, two charges. The first is that God's people have been offering false worship because their sacrifices are offered without thanksgiving and faithfulness. The second accusation is more blunt. It is that there is much wicked behaviour. In fact, they are denounced for not keeping God's law, even though they pretend that they do.

The psalmist captures gets to the heart of the accusation: "What right have you to recite my statutes? You hate the discipline of my just laws.

## **Isaiah**

Isaiah calls Israel to repent. That is the exact same invitation we receive this Lent, although it will be difficult for us to hear the prophet speaking directly into our own ears. His warning to the people of Israel begins with the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah. Rather, instead of a direct listing of their wrongdoings, it is a list of what they must do to correct those sins. "Make yourselves clean. Remove your evil behaviour. Learn to do good. Seek justice. Rescue the oppressed. Defend the orphan. Plead for the widow." There were many immoralities going on in those two cities, for which they were destroyed by fire because they were totally given over to evil and they would not repent.

We could list many of the same sins in our time. Although, we would probably say we have not yet been totally given over to evil, if we are honest, we can see some of the signs. Regardless of where you think we are on that spectrum, the remedy, the solution, the vaccine if you will, remains the same. For the psalmist, it begins with the right attitude. What God wants for his people is to live more like the image and likeness with which he has made them. Make a thankful heart your sacrifice, to honour God rather than manipulate him. That's where salvation comes from. It's true in the time of the psalmist. It's true in the time of Isaiah. It's true in the time of Jesus and it's true in our time.

## **Matthew**

Just like Isaiah and the psalmist, Jesus makes it clear what the problem is, and also what it is *not*. The authority of Moses is legitimate. That comes from God, not from humans. Those who are recognized as having authority to teach the law have every right to do so. But those two accusations I mentioned earlier. They are the same two for the Pharisees. They do all the right things. They offer their external sacrifice, but not their hearts. Further, they want the respect and honour for themselves, not for God. It is as if they are God and deserving of what should only be given to God - a thankful heart and the works of justice.

In this court of law, and with the eyes of our faith, Jesus is the judge. He *is* the Father's justice made visible. But he is also the Father's mercy made visible. He will condemn our hypocrisy and our demanding what is God's alone. He is always ready to receive our repentant hearts and provide the mercy that God alone can give us.

### **The Journey of Lent**

The Lenten discipline of prayer will be our remedy for false sacrifice. We will come to him to confess our sins with a humble heart, asking for the mercy he wants to give us. The Lenten discipline of fasting will be our remedy for our obsession with the worship of the excessive pleasures the world offers us as a god. The Lenten discipline of almsgiving will be our remedy against selfishness. It will make us aware of the need for justice for poor and oppressed and discouraged people who are all around us, even in these times of isolation.

Through all three disciplines we may realize the promise of this image from Isaiah: "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow." Scarlet and crimson red are the colour of our sins and the colour of blood. Isaiah prophesied without knowing just how true would be that it is through the blood of Jesus Christ that we would find the fullness of the washing away of sin.

God invites his children to return to the path of holiness, through the sacrament of Reconciliation, through repentance so that our sins can be washed away by the blood of Christ. Let us not hate discipline. Let God be God and let us be his people, washed in the blood of Jesus our Saviour.

## **Key Passages**

**Entrance Antiphon:** *Give light to my eyes lest I fall asleep in death, lest my enemy say: I have overcome him.*

**Collect:** *Without you, mortal humanity is sure to fall. May we be directed to all that brings salvation.*

**Isaiah:** *The vision of Isaiah. Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom, you people of Gomorrah! Wash yourselves. Make yourselves clean. Remove the evil of your doings. Learn to do good. Seek justice. Rescue the oppressed. Defend the orphan. Plead for the widow. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow. If you are willing and obedient ... Zion shall be redeemed by justice, and those in her who repent, by righteousness.*

**Psalms:** *What right have you to recite my statutes, or take my covenant on your lips? For you hate discipline and you cast my words behind you. You thought that I was one just like yourself. But now I rebuke you. Those who bring thanksgiving as their sacrifice honour me. To those I will show the salvation of God.*

**Gospel Acclamation:** *Rid yourselves of all your sins and make a new heart and a new spirit.*

**Matthew:** *Jesus said: The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' chair. therefore, do whatever they teach you but do not do as they do, for they do not practise what they teach. They do all their deeds to be seen by others and to have the places of honour and to be greeted with respect. But you have one teacher and you are all students. You have one Father in heaven. You have one instructor, the Messiah. All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.*