

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

### **St Peter's 8:30/7:00 Masses - Tuesday, February 27, 2024**

**Isaiah 1:10~31** "Make yourself clean. Avoid evil. Learn to do good. Sin like scarlet shall be white as snow."

**Psalms 50:8~23** "You hate discipline and thought I was one like yourself. But now I rebuke you."

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

### **Changing Colour From Sin To Snow**

#### **Introduction**

How perfect it is to have new snow today. We know we need more before the end of winter. We have heard that critical moisture level in the ground is low. Today this is a spiritual image of how our souls may turn from scarlet red from sin, to white snow from repentance. We don't even have to imagine how white that is. We just have to take a look on the way to our cars after mass.

The saints talk about sin in many different ways and using different images. So does Sacred Scripture. Contemporary culture has none of it. There is no talk of sin. There is condemnation, lots of it to go around. There is being offended. Everyone has a right to be offended. But no sin. It is not surprising and yet I still find myself asking 'why not?'

I ask this because I know that everyone wants to be happy. This is as natural as being human. And, if happiness is good, which St. Thomas Aquinas affirms, then seeking happiness is also good. But we are crippled in this desire because we do not understand and do not know that happiness is as close to us as the mercy and forgiveness that God offers us every day and even at every moment. But without the knowledge of our sinfulness, even the little sins, we are not receptive to these graces. Without this knowledge there is only the fake happiness, which is no happiness at all. What are we left with, that we see everywhere around us, only the satisfaction of condemning others and of being offended by others.

## **Isaiah**

In Isaiah's time, God warns the people of Israel that their sins are like those of Sodom and Gomorrah. I don't know how close we are but it is scary to think of. Yet, God offers a list of what to do: "Make yourselves clean. Remove your evil behaviour. Learn to do good. Notice that getting rid of evil is not passive. Remove it. So, it has to be forcefully combated, not passively ignored. What's the other thing: "Learn to do good." The children in school know they are supposed to be kind, but it takes a lifetime of practice to be happy in doing good: "Seek justice. Rescue the oppressed. Defend the orphan. Plead for the widow."

And what is the attached promise?: "Though your sins are like scarlet -bright red- they shall be white as snow." Scarlet and crimson red are the colour of our sins, and also the colour of blood. In saying this, 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.

## **Psalms**

The psalmist captures the heart of Jesus: "What right have you to recite my statutes? For you hate discipline. Those who bring thanksgiving as their sacrifice honour me. To those I will show the salvation of God."

Today we have this amazing Psalm 50. "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." And then there is this great line: "You thought that I was one just like yourself, but now I rebuke you and lay the charge before you."

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. It is as if we said: "Let us make God in our image, according to our likeness." What God wants for his people is to live more like the image and likeness with which he has made them.

## **Matthew**

In the Gospel, Jesus, the source of light and life, explains further the repentance that leads to true happiness. First, don't be like those who preach but don't practice. The religious leaders had the authority of Moses. They 'sat on his chair, his cathedra.

With the power of all of the prophets of old combined, Jesus denounces the Pharisees for their hypocrisy. They teach the law, but they don't help people carry the burden of the law. Thus Jesus tells the people to do what they say, but not to be like them. They are guilty of making religious leadership more of a show than an act of service. Jesus tells them to be doers of the word, as he exhorts us to bear witness to our Christian life through our example. By our baptism, we now share now in that authority that the Pharisees had, so his challenge to them is the same to all of us.

## **Call To Conversion**

The Lenten journey calls all of us to bring harmony between what we believe and what we say and what we do. Every day is a new opportunity to turn to God in humility. Modern society weakens our knowledge of the transcendent God and the awareness of our sins, endangering us to remain scarlet in that sin.

Without our God at the centre of our Lenten journey, we would be quickly overwhelmed with the weight of our sin and of the judgment for it. Let us not hate God's discipline. Let God be God and let us be his people, washed in the blood of Jesus our Saviour. We need God every second and every step of the way. Let our prayer, fasting and almsgiving be a following of Jesus, our rabbi, our teacher. Let us cry out to him again and again and again, and let him save us from our sin and from our broken human nature.

Jesus will condemn our hypocrisy, just as he did theirs. Jesus is our judge. But He is also the Father's justice made visible. He is always ready to receive our repentant hearts and provide the mercy that God alone can give us.

## **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.*