

Readings: *Isaiah 43: 16 – 21; Psalm 125 (126); Philippians 3: 8 – 14; John 8: 1 – 11.*

Today we reach the last of the Lent Sundays before Holy Week, and with it the last of the themes which I am suggesting for our reflection: it is the Forgiveness of God in Christ.

Today's gospel reading ends with the words of Jesus to the woman *who had been caught committing adultery*: "*Neither do I condemn you ... go away, and don't sin any more.*" Those words might well be part of the dismissal at the end of sacramental confession and absolution, for they give expression to the Lord's attitude to the forgiven sinner. He neither ignores the reality of sin nor maintains a judgement against the sinner. He forgives absolutely.

In the Old Testament Reading the LORD speaks through his prophet during the time of Israel's exile in Babylon. He introduces himself as the one who long ago made a way through the Red Sea for his people and defeated the Egyptian army. But now, he says, *No need to recall the past, no need to think about what was done before. See, I am doing a new deed.*

The *new deed* is the deliverance of Israel from exile, bringing them back across the waterless desert to their homeland. Just as he had provided water during their years of wandering in the desert, so now, he says, *I am putting water in the wilderness to give my chosen people to drink.*

That life-giving water is a symbol for us of the new life which Christ gives in baptism, forgiving our sins and freeing us from their burden.

Writing to the Philippians, Paul says: *All I want is to know Christ, and the power of his resurrection and to share his sufferings.* In the scriptures 'knowing' is much more than an exercise of the mind – it means entering into a relationship. Paul has begun to do that – both by sharing in the sufferings of Christ and by experiencing *the power of his resurrection*. He can *forget the past*, in which he was a denier and persecutor of Christ, and *strain ahead for what is still to come*.

He, like the woman in the gospel reading, has been absolutely forgiven and can give himself wholly to the new life in Christ.

In this last week before Holy Week those who are to be born by baptism into this new life at Easter are in the last stages of their preparation. Those of us who have already been baptized may renew our baptismal life through the ministry of sacramental confession and absolution.