

Our Mistakes Are Minor

5th Sunday in Lent (Year C)

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For those of us who are perfectionists, we don't like making mistakes. It isn't necessarily a matter of what other people think of us, but a matter of what our own inner critic thinks of us. Our own inner voice will beat us up and criticize us over and over and over again because of a mistake. It takes us a long time to move on and even then we're still bothered.

Our readings this weekend are about moving on. God doesn't want us to live in the past, especially in our past mistakes.

“Remember not the events of the past, the things of long ago consider not; see, I am doing something new!” These are the words that God tells us through the prophet Isaiah in our First Reading. For as sinful and messed up as we have been or can still be, something new is always a real possibility for us. “Do you not perceive it?” There can be breakthrough moments of change, growth, and conversion. We have to trust God on this one.

In our second reading, we come across St. Paul. Even though he thought he was doing the right thing in his former way of life, objectively he was very judgmental and violent. His mistake was that he persecuted followers of Jesus. At this point, however, after his conversion he is able to say, “just one thing: forgetting what lies behind but straining forward to what lies ahead.” He goes on, “I continue my pursuit toward the goal, the prize of God's upward calling, in Christ Jesus.” For him, moving towards our ending point is so much more important than focusing on our past or

where we are right now. We need to focus on the goal ahead of us: Christ Jesus.

Our readings this weekend culminate in the story of the woman caught in adultery in our Gospel from *John*. In it, the religious people wanted to stone this woman for her sin. In response, Jesus defended her by reminding everyone present that we all make mistakes. To go down that path of pointing fingers is a dead end. That is not the goal of religion. At the end, Jesus asks her “has no one condemned you?...Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin any more.” That is the goal of religion.

While our mistakes may bother us, they might not bother God as much as we think.

Am I still beating myself up for something in the past?

For as horrible as some mistakes are (and we cannot deny that some are embarrassing and some of them do require justice), they are not much in comparison to God’s overall plan for creation. God’s plan will move ahead with or without us. The reason for mistakes is so we can learn from them and know that God is merciful. They remind us how much we need Christ, who is the instrument of that mercy.

As we continue this season of Lent, may we like St. Paul reach the point of freedom where we can say, “I consider everything as a loss (I will add here: including my mistakes) because of the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.”