

2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time
Sunday 20 Jan 08
Is 49:3, :5-:6, 1 Cor 1:1-:3, Jn 1:29-:34

With the Christmas season behind us we're at the start of the ordinary time of the church year. So in our scripture readings today we see several new beginnings. We have the opening words of St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians, as he greets those who have been "sanctified in Jesus Christ" and "called to be holy." These are those whom Jesus has rescued from sin, and St. Paul offers them "grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

And we see Jesus near the beginning of his public ministry, as John the Baptist points towards "the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit", towards the one whose work will be so much greater than that of the Baptist himself.

In these readings we see God setting things in motion.

We see God doing new things.

We see God offering his people new gifts...

...new beginnings.

We can have this.

When we fall...

...when we stumble...

...when we fail...

...when we've been hurt...

...either through our own sins and fault...

...or because of what others have done to us...

...God offers us something new...

...God gives us a chance to have things made right.

We can have this.

No matter what's been done to us.

No matter what we've done...

...who we've hurt...

...how we've failed.

The public ministry of Jesus Christ which began as the Baptist pointed towards what Jesus would do...

...ended with Jesus Christ dying on a cross so that our sins could be forgiven...

...and rising from the dead so that we could have new life.

We're not that far away from when people made New Year's resolutions, we're only a few weeks away from when people made crazy promises about the changes they would make.

When it comes to the changes we really need to make...

...Jesus can actually do this for us.

He can wipe the slate clean.

He can give us new beginnings.

And I know there is such a need for new beginnings

I know this can be serious stuff...and I don't want to come across too strong.

There have actually been several times since I've started at Sts. Peter and Paul where I've preparing to give homilies like this, fairly challenging ones on sin and our need for forgiveness, where I've wondered if I was being too serious, was I hitting this subject too hard?

And then I heard confessions before mass. And I heard people who didn't need to be told how serious their sins were, who didn't need to be told how much they needed forgiveness.

They were just hoping that somehow they could have forgiveness, that their sins didn't need to be the end of the story.

And I knew I had to do my best to try to offer the same thing to everyone who needed it.

There are so many who are in such desperate need of Christ's forgiveness. And all they have to do is take it.

There's not much more I could hope to accomplish as a priest, than to help those who do need Christ's forgiveness to realize this, and then to offer it to them.

And...I wish things didn't have to be this way.

I wish the problem of our sins wasn't so serious.

I wish this view of things wasn't accurate.

But then...

...I think of the things people have told me they've done.

I look of the things people have told me that have been done to them.

I look at the indisputable facts of what surveys and studies tell us about crime rates...

...about the rate of marital infidelity...

...about the fact that 1 in 5 pregnancies in this country ends with the child being murdered in the womb...

...I look at what the facts tell us about the rate at which every kind of sexual sin occurs inside the church...

...and within society as a whole.

And not least of all I look at my own weakness...

...the sins of my own past...

...the things I've been tempted to do and by God's grace somehow didn't.

I wish I was wrong about the weakness and the sin that is a part of the human condition.

I wish our need for new beginnings wasn't so great.

But this is who we are.

This is what we need.

And the thing to do isn't to try to explain away our sins...

...it's not to try to explain away or justify human sinfulness.

The thing to do is to recognize how broken the world is...

...to recognize our own brokenness...

...but to realize that this isn't the end of the story.

Jesus will give us new life, Jesus will forgive our sins...

...if we're willing to let him do this.

If...

...when...

...we are in need of new beginnings...

...Jesus is waiting for us.