May I speak in the name of the one who forgives us our past, loves us in our present, and leads us towards our future; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen

Can you feel the anticipation, the tension, building? The countdown has begun…..

Jesus is now in Bethany, working his way towards Jerusalem…. Towards his triumphant entry into the city, towards his betrayal, his execution, and his resurrection. Towards his future…. And ours.

In both the Old and New Testament readings today, we are told that we need to look forward, toward the future rather than looking back…. “Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old”, “Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ.”…. All saying that the past is what was, that we cannot go back and change it. But we CAN change our future. We hear similar things in our lives today. The old joke about why is the rear view mirror in a car is so much smaller than the windshield? Because you are not driving that way (backwards)…

Even Jesus alludes to the future in the Gospel reading today in saying that “The poor will always be with you but you will not always have me.” This hints toward a future where Jesus is no longer present with his disciples. Jesus knows that his time in this mortal life is limited, is running out. Seemingly, so does Mary because she washes Jesus feet with an expensive perfume and wipes them with her hair.

Mary does this in an act of love and desire to serve her Lord…. In the Gospels of Matthew and Mark Jesus is at the home of Simon the Leper, when an anonymous woman breaks open an alabaster flask containing pure Nard and anoints Jesus head. In John’s Gospel, it is Mary wiping Jesus feet and they are in the house of Lazarus who Jesus raised from the dead. At this point, the three Gospels converge somewhat because, in all three, there is grumbling about the expensive perfume being wasted when it could have been sold, and in all three Gospels, Jesus says similar words telling the grumblers to “leave her alone. Can you not see what she has done? She has bought it in preparation for my burial” or in Matthew and Mark, “She has anointed me for my burial.” Jesus KNEW what was coming and was focused on the future….

Three weeks ago, we heard in our Gospel Reading Jesus say “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it.” Yet, this is exactly where Jesus is going. It is hard for me to imagine what must have been going on in his head at that time… But Jesus kept pushing forward, kept moving towards what God had willed him to do, towards his death and towards his glorious resurrection.

In our Epistle Reading, St. Paul says :

“Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ”

And then goes on : ”Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: *forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.*

Pressing on, looking ahead – Jesus is pressing on towards Jerusalem, towards death on the cross but, more importantly, towards his resurrection in the Glory of God. In doing that, he puts himself, as is God’s Will, between humankinds sinful nature and the Glory of God. Jesus forms the bridge between the temporal here and now, the past and the present and an infinite future – eternal life in God. Jesus is leaving the past behind, the mortal life in order to obtain Salvation FOR US.

As Isaiah foretold, Jesus is about to do a new thing. Something that has never been done before.

What about us? What “new thing” are WE about to do? We are two weeks from the end of Lent, the end of the forty days of fasting, self-denial, self-examination. What have we learned in that time? About ourselves, about our faith? Some may have learned that their addiction to chocolate or coffee was stronger than they realized. Others have learned that a “plastic-free” life is MUCH more difficult than they had first imagined… But what have we learned about ourselves, about our relationships with each other, our relationship with God?

As we come closer and closer to the end of Lent, to the Last Supper, to the horrific events of Good Friday, toward the glorious resurrection of Easter Morning, let us use this remaining time to make our peace with the past, to ask for forgiveness where it is needed from others, to grant forgiveness where it is needed, even if those we forgive haven’t asked or even “deserve” our forgiveness and forgiving ourselves for those things that burden our own souls.

Leaving the past in the past, coming face-to-face with true remorse for those things which we have done or not done and being able to forgive ourselves rather than living with and wallowing in a sense of shame or guilt allows us to grasp the vastness of God’s forgiveness and love for us. This does NOT mean that we are simply to “forget” what has gone before. Forgiveness is by no means a free pass for bad behaviour and forgiveness doesn’t happen overnight. It is NOT like flipping a switch. In fact, when we forgive others who have wronged or harmed us, it is not something we do for them, but rather something we do for ourselves. We give the negative experience, the anger, the bitterness to God and allow God’s love, God’s mercy and God’s peace to take its place within our OWN lives. What is even more wondrous, is that, even when we cannot find the strength within ourselves to forgive at a particular moment in time, God’s forgiveness works through us and through our lives in God’s time.

Every Sunday we ask God to forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us…. Does that not include forgiving ourselves? By practicing forgiveness, starting with ourselves and extending it to others, we allow Christ’s love, God’s love for us to shine through us into the world.

Bishop Jake Owensby from Louisiana put it this way in a recent Blog post - “From the perspective of love, life is a growth process. A messy and imperfect, frequently beautiful sometimes terrible growth process. And, crucially, we are not alone in the growing. God is in it with us, not sitting back and waiting for us to hammer ourselves into an acceptable shape. Our past will become that beyond which we have grown. Even the most harrowing, humbling, and cringeworthy moments of our lives provide the soil from which Jesus nurtures us into eternal life.”

Our Lord Jesus Christ, to his very end, was forgiving of those who wronged him and who were, at that very moment wronging him saying, “Forgive them Father, for they know not what they do.” Christ shows us the way and, by his love, leads us into the future, a future of eternal life in Him. By forgiving others and by forgiving ourselves for what has occurred in the past, by showing Christ’s forgiveness and love towards our neighbours in the present, we too can do a new thing. We too, like St. Paul, press on toward the future, for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

Amen