

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Fifth Sunday of Lent. Over the last four weeks, we have journeyed through Old Testament salvation history in the light of God's covenants. In today's reading from Jeremiah, God promises a new covenant: "*But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD. I will place my law within them, and write it upon their hearts; I will be their God, and they shall be my people....*"

We believe that Jesus himself is the New Covenant, the new relationship of love between God and us. We believe that Jesus is one divine person, the Son of God, with two natures, a divine nature and a human nature, thus truly God and truly human. In other words, in the unity of his person, God and we meet and come together. As St. Irenaeus wrote, "Christ became what we are that he might make us what he is himself." The Son of God by nature became human so that we, who are human, might become sons and daughters of God by adoption and consequently brothers and sisters of each other.

In today's Gospel, Jesus said, "*And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself.*" If Jesus himself is the New Covenant, this New Covenant was sealed or ratified by Jesus' death on the cross. We participate in this ratification of the New Covenant every time we celebrate Eucharist. During the consecration of the wine, the priest speaks the words of Jesus: "FOR THIS IS THE CHALICE OF MY BLOOD, THE BLOOD OF THE NEW AND ETERNAL COVENANT, WHICH WILL BE Poured OUT FOR YOU AND FOR MANY FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS. DO THIS IN MEMORY OF ME." The New Covenant ratified in Christ's blood reunited God and us and us among ourselves.

When God promised to place his law within us and write it upon our hearts, he was not talking about the Old Testament Law or the Ten Commandments. Rather he was talking about the New Law of Grace, i.e., his own life and love given to us as gift, the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit living within us calls forth the best in us, calling us to become Christ like, calling us to grow into the likeness of the Risen Christ, so that we might say with St. Paul, "*It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me*" [Gal. 2:20a].

My brothers and sisters, today's first reading concludes with God's beautiful promise: "*I will forgive their evildoing and remember their sin no more.*" God not only forgives. He also forgets. To say that God forgets our sins is to say that God lets go of them. He no longer holds them against us. Although God has no problem forgiving us, we often have a problem forgiving others, and we often have a problem forgiving ourselves.

Forgiving others is almost always difficult. Even when we forgive them, we often have an even harder time forgetting, i.e., letting go of their offense. We make a conscious choice to forgive them, but we hold on to the hurt, the offense. Sometimes people never let go of the past offenses of others. The truth is that if we are not willing to forget, i.e., let go, we really have not forgiven in our hearts. Our lack of forgiveness from the heart hurts us far more than it hurts them. Likewise, at times we are less forgiving of ourselves than we are of others. As with others, we often forgive ourselves, but we cannot let go of the guilt. If God forgives us, he wants us to forgive ourselves, to let go of our past sins. If we do not let go of our past sins, we will never become the best version of ourselves, nor will we be able to completely fulfill God's plan for us.