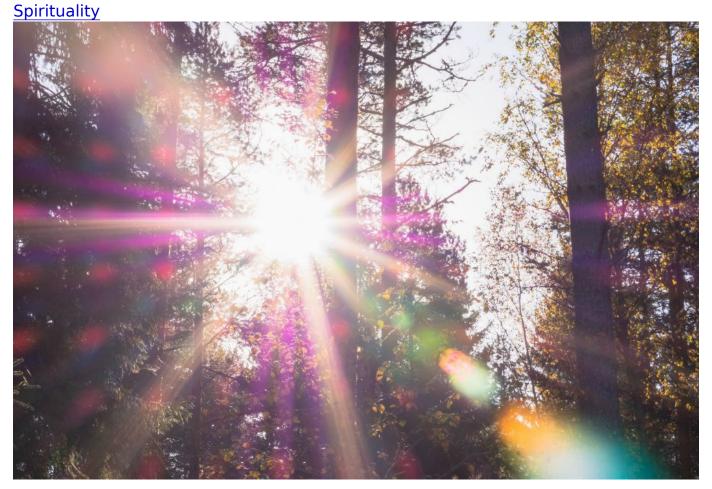(Unsplash/Patrick Selin)

by Thomas Gumbleton

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April 11, 2019

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You may recall the last couple of weeks our Scripture lesson had provided us with extraordinary teachings about how God's love is always available to us. God first loves us before we ever loved God. Two weeks ago we reminded ourselves of how Isaiah put it when he talked about the chosen people and their failure to follow the way of God, and against God's will went to war and were totally defeated. But then Isaiah says, "God is waiting to be gracious to us." No matter our sins, God is waiting to be gracious.

Fifth Sunday of Lent

[April 7, 2019](#)

Isaiah 43:16-21

Psalm 126:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 6

Philippians 3:8-14

John 8:1-11

(Year C readings)

Last week we also had another example of the extraordinary love of God for us when we reflected on how God's love was a kind of love where when the prodigal son ran away and lived a life of squalor, comes back, and his father was waiting for him, waiting, and then runs out to greet him and bring him home. God's love is like that — unlimited and always comes first. God is always waiting for us to turn toward God.

The Gospel today continues to show this merciful love of God. These leaders of the chosen people, testing Jesus because they wanted to trip him up, accuse him of not obeying the law by choosing to say that this woman should not be stoned. Or if he doesn't do that, get in trouble with the Roman authorities because the Roman authorities had taken away from the leadership of the chosen people the right to put people to death.

They were trying to trap Jesus — totally hypocritical. We see how mercifully Jesus handles the whole situation, exposing the hypocrisy of the leaders, and showing the

most kind of tender love for this woman who obviously is being mistreated because you have to ask yourself, "What about the other person? Doesn't he deserve to be stoned?" But beyond that, Jesus would not in any way want to be so cruel as the leaders were trying to draw him into being. He simply says, "We all need God's forgiveness."

We all need to come before God as sinners and open ourselves to this God who is waiting to be gracious to us, this God who loves us first, draws us into being out of love, and sustains us in our life at every moment out of love. "God is love," St. John tells us in the first letter he wrote, "Where there is love, there is God, but God first loved us." That's the message that we must hear again today. At some point, that message will overwhelm us if we really let it sink in that God is a God of love and God loves us.

As we enter into these final two weeks of Lent, we must begin to try to deepen that awareness of how God loves us as we contemplate how Jesus goes through his sufferings and death, and finally hangs on the cross where as he said about himself, "I, when I am lifted up will draw all people to myself — because as I'm lifted up on the cross, I pour forth love on everyone, on the whole human family, on those putting me to death — I, when I am lifted up will draw all people to myself."

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If we reflect on this truth about who God is and really let it sink in and make ourselves aware of it that at every instant God is loving us, we will go through this week and Holy Week as Paul did, conforming ourselves to Jesus as he dies so that we will then rejoice with Jesus as he rises to new life and shares that new life with us at Easter. I pray that all of us will listen deeply to these words of Scripture, heed the call of Jesus, be aware of God's love for us, conform ourselves to his way, and come to new life on Easter.

Editor's note: This homily was given April 7 at St. Ambrose Church in Grosse Pointe, Michigan. The transcripts of Bishop Thomas Gumbleton's homilies are posted weekly to NCRonline.org. Sign up here to receive an email alert when the latest homily is posted.