

Pastor's Column

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See, I Am Doing Something New!

A priest-friend of mine would often tell the story of Gertie van Slembock*.

Gertie and her family moved from Detroit to River City*, a small town, about 50 miles north of Detroit.

Gertie was seventeen years old when her family moved to River City. Over the years, she became an active member of the community, and was well known. She died when she was eighty-five years old, living in River City for over sixty-eight years.

My priest-friend was the Associate Pastor in the Catholic Church in River City for a number of years and was there at the time of Gertie's death.

When Gertie first arrived in River City, she would be introduced to the locals as "Gertie, from Detroit." Well, the descriptive stuck, and over the years, every time she was introduced to someone, it was "This is Gertie van Slembock, from Detroit."

Her obituary in the local newspaper at the time of her death remained true to form: "Gertie van Slembock, from Detroit, died at the age of eighty-five, having lived in River City for over sixty-eight years..."

At best, this can be seen as a funny anecdote of small town living or, at worst, it may indicate the possibility that Gertie truly felt like an outsider her entire life in River City. What a sad commentary, if the latter was true!

It is all too common the way in which we human beings categorize, stereotype, and box people in with descriptives, judgments, and condemnations.

All too often we see someone in a negative light, because of some bad decision or action of theirs, and we freeze that moment for all time.

We can do that to ourselves as well. We experience failure, weakness, addiction, or sin, and we believe that there is no getting out, no changing, and no future that can be better or brighter.

The Scriptures this weekend for the Fifth Sunday of Lent tell a different story. They tell a story that with God and the gift of God's Son, Jesus, there are endless new possibilities and new beginnings that can lead to a different and better future.

With the help of Jesus, we do not need to remain trapped.

In the Gospel, the woman caught in adultery is released from her trap set by Jesus' religious elders. He causes them to throw down their stones, to throw down their judgments, and walk away.

He then says to her, "*Go, and from now on, sin no more.*" With these words, she is freed to begin again, to work to create a new and better future for herself.

With these words, Jesus becomes the embodiment of the words uttered by Isaiah on behalf of God in the first reading, "*See, I am doing something new.*"

During this Season of Lent, we have been praying to be more like Jesus. We can become more like him, by letting ourselves and others out of the traps we have set.

Let us let go of the descriptives, the judgments, and the condemnations that imprison. Let us forgive, and let us be willing to look at the lives of others and ourselves in a new light. Let us be willing to allow new and better possibilities and futures to happen for others and for ourselves.

As we do this, God will be working in and through us, and God will be saying, "*See, I am doing something new.*"

**Name and place have been changed to protect the innocent!*

F.R. Mike