

One of the toughest things people have to deal with in the present is the past. As we go through life, we make some mistakes. Some of those mistakes never leave us. Their consequences remain throughout our lives. They create memories we wish we could erase. When we remember past sins, we may feel a tightening of the stomach or shoulders, or even physical pain.

Some of our past sins were very private. They did not affect many other people. But they hurt us. We betrayed what we believed in, and as a result we suffer despair and remorse. Even when the people closest to us do not know our past actions, we know them, and they bother us.

Christians believe in the forgiveness of sins. We believe that if we confess our guilt before God, we receive mercy. We no longer have to be concerned, because we know that God will always give us another chance. We believe that as Christians.

But as humans, we sometimes cannot let go of the sin we have committed. Even if God has forgiven us, even if the people we hurt have forgiven us, we sometimes cannot forgive ourselves. We cannot let go of the hurt we have caused.

Some of this remorse is good, because it keeps us from sinning again in the same way. But to dwell excessively on the past is to miss the good news of the present, the news of God's mercy.

In today's passage from the prophecy of Isaiah, God speaks words of comfort to Israel. "Remember not the events of the past," God says. "See, I am doing something new!" The chosen people were supposed to announce God's praise, but instead they were burdening God with sins and crimes. Still, just when you would expect God to complain about these actions, our creator says something else: "It is I, I, who wipe out, for my own sake, your offenses; your sins I remember no more." Our sins are forgiven not for our sake, but for God's sake. God wants to forgive and wants to remember no more our offenses. That is God's desire.

It is sometimes hard in the midst of our sin to recognize this side of God's personality. God not only can forgive sins; God wants to forgive sins. If we still have not forgiven ourselves for mistakes we've made in the past, we may not yet have plumbed the depths of this mystery. We may not yet fully realize who this God is. This is a God who forgives. This is a God who knows what we did and still accepts us. To believe that in the present is to let go of the past.