

Homily of Fourth Week of Lent, Year B

The first reading tells us what happened to the people of Israel when they continued to sin and turned against God. They refused to listen to the prophets God sent to them. "All the princes of Judah, the priests, and the people added infidelity to infidelity...The Lord, the God of their fathers, send messengers to them ... But they mocked the messengers of God despised their warnings, and scoffed at his prophets ..." The result of this was that they moved away from God and fell into the hands of their enemies who conquered them. "Their enemies burned down the house of God, tore down the walls of Jerusalem, set all the palaces afire, and destroyed all its precious objects. Those who escaped the sword were carried captive to Babylon, where they became servants of the king of the Chaldeans ..."

After seventy years, the Persians conquered the Babylonian Empire, and surprisingly King Cyrus of Persia released the people of Israel to return to their land.

The consequence of the rejection of God by the people of Israel, as we have read in the first reading, happens to anyone and any people who turn away from God. The person or the people falls into the waiting arms of the Evil One. This explains the reasons for so much disintegration being experienced in our society and our world today. We are not expecting, in this modern time, that a country is conquered by another, and citizens of the conquered country carry off into captivity. However, many people, families, communities and countries are in spiritual captivity and enslavement caused by sin and turning away from God.

Derailed conditions which some individuals find themselves is a type of spiritual captivity and enslavement caused by sin and turning away from God. Disaffection and estrangement existing in some families due to hate and lack of love is a form of spiritual captivity and enslavement. Disaffection and estrangement are sins and turning away from God.

At the root of economic, political and refugee crises in many parts of the world are a result of sin and a turning away from God by the rulers of those countries. At the root of lack of development and poverty in some countries and continents are the sin and turning away from God by the leaders of those countries.

Jesus is the new King Cyrus, who has redeemed us and set us free from captivity and enslavement caused by sin and evil. In the fourth week of Lent, we are invited to examine ourselves to know whether we are held captive and enslaved, in anyway, by sin; and turn to Jesus to free and liberate us. Jesus says in the Gospel, "And this is the verdict, that the light came into the world, but people preferred darkness to light, because their works are evil." Let us not be among those who prefer darkness to light.

These passages from the Bible are worth reflecting upon: "And my people who bear my name humble themselves, and pray and look for me, and turn from their wicked ways then I myself will hear from heaven and forgive their sins and restore their land" (2 Chronicle 7:14). "I do not want the wicked to die but rather that they turn from their evil ways and live" (Ezekiel 33:11). The penitential service scheduled in the parish on Monday, 26th of March, is an excellent opportunity to confess our sins and return to God.

Finally, we turn to Jesus in our prayers as we celebrate this Mass to save us from various difficulties of life: sickness, grief, stress, depression, injustice, unemployment and many other afflictions. Amen.

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