

Homily of Fourth Sunday of Lent Year B, 2021

2 Chronicle 36:14-16; 19-23; Psalm 137:1-6; Ephesians 2:4-10; John 3:14-21

The first reading tells us what happened to the people of Israel when they continued to sin and turned away from 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, practicing all the abominations of the nations and polluting the Lord's temple...The Lord, the God of their fathers, sent 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 turns 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 homes, society, and world. We do not expect, in this modern time, that a country is conquered by another, and the citizens of the conquered country carried off into captivity, as happened to the people of Israel. However, many people, families, communities and countries are in spiritual captivity and enslavement caused by infidelity upon infidelity, abominations, corruption, and criminal pollution of all kinds. The crises in political, judiciary, economic, health, education, religious, social systems, and so on in many parts of the world are as a result of sin and turning away from God by the rulers of those countries. At the root of underdevelopment, poverty, hunger, sickness, and destitution in some parts of the world are the sins and turning away from God by the rulers. God has not designed or ascribed any people or part of the world to be impoverished and stagnant. Unfortunately, corrupt rulers and their accomplices demonize, persecute and eliminate God's messengers who dare to denounce them. We continue to pray for the conversion of corrupt rulers and God's deliverance of his afflicted children.

The Book of Wisdom 1:12-16 cautions us,

"Do not court death by your erring way of life, nor draw to yourselves destruction by the works of your hands. Because God did not make death nor does he rejoice in the destruction of the living. For he fashioned all things that they might have being, and the creatures of the world are wholesome. There is not a destructive drug among them nor any domain of Hades on earth. For righteousness is undying. It was the wicked who with hands and words invited death, considered it a friend, and pined for it, and made a covenant with it; because they deserve to be allied with it."

In today's gospel, Jesus, also, cautions us not to prefer evil to good. He says, "And this is the verdict, that the light came into the world, but people preferred darkness to light, because their works are evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, so that his works might not be exposed" (John 3:19).

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, in anyway, held captive and enslaved by sin; and turn to Jesus to free and liberate us. St. Paul in the second reading says, "God who is rich in mercy, because of the great love he had for us [his handiwork], even when we were dead in our transgressions, brought us to life with Christ..." (Ephesians 2:4). St. John tells us in today's gospel, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him" (John 3:16-17).

The following passages 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).

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