

Homily of Fourth Sunday of Lent, Year B, 2024

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

The Fourth Sunday of Lent is called *Laetare* Sunday. *Laetare* is a Latin word that means 'Rejoice.' Amid our Lenten penance, *Laetare* Sunday puts us in hopeful expectation of the Easter joy. Today's Mass entrance antiphon is, "Rejoice, Jerusalem, and all who were in mourning; exult and be satisfied at her consoling breast" (Isaiah 66:10-11).

The first reading is what happened to the people of Israel when they turned away from God and continued to sin. "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 ... sent messengers to them ... But they mocked the messengers of God, despised their warnings, and scoffed at his prophets ..." 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 ..." This is a story of sin and the consequence of refusal to repent.

The consequence of the rejection of God by the people of Israel happens to anyone and any people who turn away from God and turn to evil. This explains the reasons for so much disintegration in our homes, society, and world. Underdevelopment, poverty, hunger, sickness, hardship, migration, and so on are consequences of the sins of the 'princes' (rulers), the priests (religious leaders), and the people. God has not designed or ascribed impoverishment and suffering to any group of people or any part of the world. The Book of Wisdom 1:12-16 says, "... 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. ... It was the wicked who, with hands and words, invited death"

God admonishes us through Prophet Ezekiel, "I do not want the wicked to die but rather that they turn from their evil ways and live" (Ezekiel 33:11). And in 2 Chronicles 7:14 God says, "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."

The first reading tells us that 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. Jesus is the new King Cyrus, who has redeemed us and sets us free from captivity and enslavement caused by sin and evil. In this fourth week of Lent, we are invited to examine ourselves to see if we are held captive and enslaved either by sin or weakness or concerns of life; and turn to Jesus to free and liberate us. He tells us to prefer him, the Light, instead of darkness. 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" (John 3:19). It must not be so with 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). Jesus says in the 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).

In today's gospel, Nicodemus has something to teach us. He was a Jewish leader, but his desire for the Light kept him restless and sleepless. Who knows how long he was in this state? On that particular night, he could no longer hold back or even wait for daybreak. While others were sleeping and may be some others were having good times, he went in search of the Light. He found the Light and became part of our salvation story. Later in John 7:51, as a changed man, he reminded other Jewish leaders who wanted Jesus arrested of law, "Does our law condemn a man without first hearing him to find out what he has been doing?" He helped Joseph of Arimathea to bury Jesus. He brought a costly mixture of myrrh and aloes that weighed about 100 pounds (45kg), which was used to prepare Jesus' body for burial (John 19:39-40).

What keeps me restless and sleepless? Is the desire for the Light part of it, or is it completely the concerns of life, or is it the desire to sin? Like Nicodemus, can I be a voice of truth in times of falsehood?

Jesus welcomed Nicodemus when he came to him at night. This means that Jesus is ever-ready waiting to welcome us.

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