

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

LECTONARY #32

READING I 2 Chronicles 36:14-16, 19-23

A reading from the second Book of Chronicles

In those days, 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 which he had consecrated in Jerusalem.

Early and often did the LORD, the God of their fathers, send his messengers to them,

for he had compassion on his people and his dwelling place.

But they mocked the messengers of God,

despised his warnings, and scoffed at his prophets,

until the anger of the LORD against his people was so inflamed that there was no remedy.

Their enemies burnt the house of God,

tore down the walls of Jerusalem,

set all its 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

and his sons

until the kingdom of the Persians came to power.

Chronicles = KRAH-nih-k*1s

Announce the name of the book carefully.

This is the only time the book is used in

Year B.

Judah = JOO-duh

Look for the distinct parts of the narrative:

sinful behavior, sending of the prophets,

the description of punishment, and the

decree to return. Plan your pauses for

a scene change.

Capture the callous and contemptuous

tone the people had for their prophets.

Chaldeans = kal-DEE-uhnz or kah-DEE-uhnz

There are options for today's readings. Contact your parish staff to learn which readings will be used.

READING I

The first reading recounts two remarkable moments in the history of God's people—the destruction and restoration of Jerusalem. The catastrophic destruction of Jerusalem and its temple at the hands of Babylonians was a pivotal and dark moment in biblical history. God's apparent dwelling place on earth was thought to be unassailable. Its

destruction led to questions about God's omnipotence. Could God not protect the chosen place? But, as this passage from 2 Chronicles indicates, the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple was anticipated. God sent prophets with warnings and invitations to repentance—expressions of divine compassion to the people. Jeremiah 7 rendered such warnings (see Jeremiah 7 and 26), and before him, Micah (see Micah 3:12). Yet despite these warnings, the people did not repent. Their wrongdoing continued, especially with regard to temple rituals. So, according to Chronicles, the

people's persistent wrongdoing occasioned Jerusalem's destruction and the Babylonian exile. Servitude ensued for many of God's people in Babylon, who lived along waterways that likely amounted to little more than drainage ditches, as suggested by the prophet Ezekiel (1:1 and 3:15) and Psalm 137. But Jerusalem's destruction and the Babylonian exile did not constitute God's total abandonment of the people. Alongside today's account of Jerusalem's destruction is an account of one of the brightest moments in the history of God's people—the promise of return to and res-

All this was to fulfill the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah: "Until the land has retrieved its lost sabbaths, during all the time it lies waste it shall have rest while seventy years are fulfilled." In the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah, the LORD inspired King Cyrus of Persia to issue this proclamation throughout his kingdom, both by word of mouth and in writing: "Thus says Cyrus, king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the LORD, the God of heaven, has given to me, and he has also charged me to build him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever, therefore, among you belongs to any part of his people, let him go up, and may his God be with him!"

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 137:1-2, 3, 4-5, 6 (gab)

R. Let my tongue be silenced, if I ever forget you!

By the streams of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. On the aspens of that land we hung up our harps. For there our captors asked of us the lyrics of our songs, and our despoilers urged us to be joyous: "Sing for us the songs of Zion!" How could we sing a song of the LORD in a foreign land? If I forget you, Jerusalem, may my right hand be forgotten! May my tongue cleave to my palate if I remember you not, if I place not Jerusalem ahead of my joy.

For meditation and context:

Cyrus = St-rubs
A king of another nation was inspired by God. The demonstration of the universality of God's jurisdiction outside of Israel is an important lesson. Are we open to the wisdom of those outside our tradition? Our borders? Announce the king's proclamation to release the Israelites with the solemnity of a government decree.

toration of Jerusalem, beginning with the temple. Remarkably, this bright moment comes not through the patronage of a Davidic king but through Cyrus of Persia. This most unlikely restorer—a foreign king from east of Mesopotamia—is called an anointed one or messiah in Isaiah 45:1. Through Cyrus, God faithfully maintains the covenant forged with the people despite their unfaithfulness. In the first reading, then, we find an invitation to see that God responds to unfaithfulness with not only justice but abiding faithfulness. As such, we might say

READING II

that the first "move" of today's Liturgy of the Word is a call to repentance and conversion, trusting that God is prepared to offer us compassion and mercy.

Continuing the theme of the first reading, Paul begins by announcing that God "is rich in mercy" and abundantly loving toward us. He makes this assertion based on what God has done for us in Christ. In view of Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension in glory, Paul proclaims that our state of being has been changed. Once destined for death on account of sin, God's saving work in Christ destines us for life. By being sacramentally initiated into and abiding in his passion, death, resurrection, and ascension, we experience "the immeasurable riches" of God's grace. No longer aiming at judgment, we enjoy the promise of abiding union (communion) with God in Christ. Typical of Paul, he emphasizes how our new and blessed state was brought about: "by grace you have been saved." This phrase echoes like a refrain throughout this reading, making it clear that we have not earned and cannot earn God's

READING II Ephesians 2:4-10

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Ephesians

Brothers and sisters:

God, who is rich in mercy, because of the great love he had for us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, brought us to life with Christ—by grace you have been saved—
raised us up with him,
and seated us with him in the heavens in Christ Jesus,
that in the ages to come
he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace
in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.
For by grace you have been saved through faith,
and this is not from works, it is the gift of God;
it is not from works, so no one may boast.
For we are his handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for the
good works
that God has prepared in advance,
that we should live in them.

Ephesians = ee-FEE-zhuhn-z

When proclaiming an address ("Brothers and sisters"), use a falling inflection.

God continues to choose us and to love us despite our sinfulness. As you prepare to proclaim Paul's exhortatory text, listen to the traditional hymn "Amazing Grace." We should strive to keep the spirit of amazement and gratitude alive each day.

God has lovingly and intentionally created each one of us. Let your proclamation communicate that sentiment.

Nicodemus = nihk-uh-DEE-muhz

Read Numbers 21:4-9 to understand the Old Testament reference here.

GOSPEL John 3:14-21

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John

Jesus said to Nicodemus:

"Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life."

GOSPEL

Paul reminds us that we do not do this

work to earn God's love but to respond generously to the love and mercy he has already extended to us in Christ.

Today's Gospel is best understood in its broader context. Nicodemus, a pharisee, leader, and teacher among the Jews, comes to Jesus at night to have a conversation about who Jesus is (John 3:1-2, 10). As a pharisee, Nicodemus believes in the resurrection. As a leader and teacher, he represents and influences the broader Jewish community. Despite being a learned Jewish leader, which clarifies nothing for Nicodemus, especially called to during Lent as we prepare to celebrate Easter. Paul's message today aligns us well with our Lenten call to repent, to turn back to God in all things.

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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.
 Whoever believes in him will not be condemned,
 but whoever does not believe has already been condemned,
 because he has not believed in the name of the only Son
 of God.
 And this is the verdict,
 that the light came into the world,
 but people preferred darkness to light,
 because their works were evil.
 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light
 and does not come toward the light,
 so that his works might not be exposed.
 But whoever lives the truth comes to the light,
 so that his works may be clearly seen as done in God.

Nicodemus remains confused and seemingly irritates Jesus, who asks Nicodemus how he can be a teacher and not understand this (John 3:10). To instruct Nicodemus, Jesus explains what he means by rebirth and why it matters.
 This brings us to today's Gospel. In it, Jesus compares Moses' lifting up the serpent in the desert to heal the Israelites (see Numbers 21:4-9) to himself. In doing so, he means to explain that the exchange between heaven and earth, between God and the people, is fulfilled in him. Jesus completes the exchange between heaven and earth by being lifted up on the cross, and earth by being lifted up on the cross, rising from the dead, and ascending into heaven. Importantly, there is one reason for Jesus' exchange: "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." This core Gospel message is often invoked in the crowds at large sporting events on posters reading simply "John 3:16." This is an important message about our faith because it reframes what it means to approach God. Through faith in Jesus, we can approach God with confidence that he promises salvation rather than judgment and condemnation. Consequently, Jesus continues his conversation with Nicodemus by declaring that faith in him fosters confidence to take up open pursuit of God "in daylight," as it were, rather than in private nighttime conversations. Thus, today's Gospel closes with a challenge to take up open public pursuit of our faith. In doing so, we more firmly abide in Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension, into which we were initiated in our baptismal rebirth. E.W.

Don't rush this familiar verse. In this passage, "so" means "in this way," not the adverbial "to such a great extent." Reflect on how this changes the meaning.
 The frequent use of "not" can be confusing. Practice so that it makes sense to you, and in turn, the assembly's comprehension will improve. Use a compassionate tone to communicate God's mercy.
 Use the Johannine theme of light and dark to examine your conscience. We aren't just proclaiming these words to others; we are meant to hear them and take them into our hearts as well.