

## Fourth Sunday of Lent – March 11, 2018 – Good Shepherd Parish

### Scripture Reading: 2 Chronicles 36:14-16, 19-23

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. 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!"

### Psalm: Ps 137:1-2, 3, 4-5, 6

R. (6ab) 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.

### Scripture Reading: Ephesians 2:4-10

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 you; 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.

### Gospel: John 3:14-21

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."

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.



### Lenten Prayer

God our Father,  
you know our weakness and sinfulness.  
Stay close to us  
through the difficulties and trials of life.  
Keep us faithful during our Lenten practice,  
and give us the grace  
to pick up our daily crosses and follow after  
your Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy  
Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen

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### **INVITATION TO PRAY**

*Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.*

#### **Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.**

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

### **INVITATION TO REFLECT**

Ignoring God cannot be a good thing. We all know that. But the readings on this Fourth Lenten Sunday drive the point home. The First Reading says the people of Judah “added infidelity to infidelity,” worshipping false gods, polluting the sacred temple, vigorously ignoring the real God. Read the First Reading for the terrible details. Out of compassion God sent prophets to warn them. Each received only scorn. They would not listen. Our author says, “There was no remedy.” The people were condemned by their own actions. God's love remained constant, but theirs didn't. So invading forces took them as captives into Babylon, where they remained in exile for seventy years until the good and just King Cyrus conquered Babylon and let them go.

For a Responsorial Psalm we have one of the most poignant of all, the exquisite Psalm 137. In it, the people, captives in a foreign land, weep. They refuse to sing the songs of Judah because they are exiled from everything they held dear, everything that had been taken from them—through their own infidelity. As far as they knew, the light of life had gone out. But, in truth, they had preferred darkness to light. John's Gospel tells us that the guilty person “has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.” God has no desire to condemn, but we condemn ourselves by walling God out! At the end of this Gospel reading there is a very interesting, wise saying that sums up the message of all the readings:

*“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.”* Maybe these sentences reveal the heart of sin itself. Light displays too much of life. We become ashamed. We hide ourselves, our sinfulness. Yet ..... we are built to seek the light.

Perhaps the present writer can be pardoned for presenting in this space a poem, especially one that he himself wrote. It is a fable, set in the style of a children's verse. I recommend that you read it out loud with pauses. Perhaps it will speak to you of the readings.

*Once there was a city built in the sunlight. Warmth and laughter did abound.  
Memories of day would remain every night until the sun could return.  
Fear one morning said light is too bright. Too much of truth can be seen.  
How can we seem what we say we are, if light the intruder is here?  
So walls went up and a ban on all windows and nothing of day could remain.  
The city said, you have left us, O sun. In the darkness we have gone blind.  
But the sun outside still shed its light, and its warmth and its laughter and love.  
It lightened the walls, gave warmth to their chill, while within, the soul bored a hole.  
Into it poured a single beam, a sunlight of laughter and care.  
Softly, silently, almost like spring, love opened and blossomed and grew.\*  
Listen to the light. Listen to God this Lent. Let love blossom and grow.*

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### **INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING**

1. “The God of their fathers [sent] his messengers to them, for he had compassion on his people”. Does God send messengers now? What about to you personally? Does God send messengers “early and often”? Can you give an example? What can you do to “open your door wider” so that all the messengers can get in?
2. “In *Diary of a Country Priest*, author George Bernanos makes this statement: “Grace is everywhere.” Can this be true? Discuss.
3. “For God so loved the world that he sent his only Son...” So what is your job? Are you one who will tell the world about this love? Name some ways (other than preaching) that you can do this. Might you run into difficulties at times? Is it true that you are not alone and that you will always receive the grace you need?

### **INVITATION TO ACT**

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

### **CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY**

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

O God, who through your Word reconcile the human race to yourself in a wonderful way, grant, we pray, that with prompt devotion and eager faith the Christian people may hasten toward the solemn celebrations to come. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen