

The Fourth Sunday of Lent

With the Fourth Sunday of Lent, we draw ever closer to Holy Week and our celebration of the great paschal mystery—Christ’s passage from death to life. In today’s second reading and in the gospel, the death of Christ begins to loom on the horizon. The first reading summarizes the tragic history of Israel, which was the result of not remaining faithful to God’s covenant.

First Reading: Punishment for Disobedience (2 Chronicles 36:14-16, 19-23): During the first three weeks of Lent the Church’s Liturgy drew our attention to the covenants God made with humanity and with Israel through Noah, Abraham, and Moses. But this fourth week of Lent, our attention is drawn to the punishment that came upon Israel for not remaining faithful to these covenants—exile into the land of Babylon. Israel’s exile into Babylon, however, was not God’s final word, as today’s reading shows. God’s judgment is meant to purify and restore Israel. And so, after the period of the Exile, the people are restored to their land, where God summons them to be faithful to the covenant with renewed favor. God’s judgment in our own lives has a similar purpose. When God punishes our sins it is to purify and restore us to new life.

Second Reading: By Grace We Have Been Saved (Ephesians 2:4-10): Today’s second reading is a summary of one of St. Paul’s most important teachings—we are saved by God’s grace. It is not a matter of what we have done that brings about our salvation; it is a matter of what God has done for us in his Son, Jesus Christ. Once we were dead to God because of our sins; we had no hope for salvation. But in God’s gracious mercy, we were raised up in Christ to a new life. In this way God showed us the riches of his grace and love for us. This is not our work; it is God’s work on behalf of us. Does this mean that we don’t have to do anything since all is grace? No! In restoring us to new life in Christ, God has created us for good works. We have been restored in Christ so that we can live the kind of life that is made possible by God—a life that brings us the fullness of joy and happiness, even now, if we are faithful to God.

The Gospel: God Sent His Son to Save the World (John 3:14-21): Why did God send his Son into the world? Did God send his only Son, his beloved Son, to condemn the world? St. John answers this question in today’s Gospel. God sent his Son into the world to save the world so that all who believe in the Son of God might have the light of eternal life. The Son of God comes into the world to expose the darkness that is Sin and to reveal the Truth that is God. The Son comes to separate the light from the darkness, the truth from what is a lie. Christ does not condemn us. God does not condemn us. We condemn ourselves when we refuse to live in the light and the truth that Christ brings into the world.

The Time Is Short: We are now half way through Lent, and in another few weeks we will be celebrating Holy Week. Are you ready? Have you made the most of this Lent. Have you grown in prayer, almsgiving and fasting? Have you received the Sacrament of Reconciliation yet?

Father Matera

This week is the fourth week of my Lenten series on the Psalms. In this week's session I discuss those psalms that celebrate the kingship of God, Psalms that help us understand Jesus' central message about the kingdom of God. Join us on Thursday at 7:30 PM in the Lower Church Hall