

- You know...I often wonder if we don't water down Christianity too much.
  - The tacit consensus in our day is *"Don't dare say anything negative! Give them only butterflies and rainbows!"*
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  - Well, we who grew up in the 60s and 70s can often remember that CCD classes were often just that: making posters and banners of butterflies and rainbows...with nothing but soft, gentle themes—Jesus being a sort of kindly big brother who rescues us from whatever jam we get ourselves in.
  - There is, of course, truth to that. God is always ready to forgive... always ready to receive us back home. Luke 15: the Prodigal Son story. And Jesus IS the good shepherd, always seeking us out with his grace.
  - But...what is often missing is the mention of our responsibility and, indeed, our obligation.
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  - Our example from today's first reading from 2 Chronicles is one of many such explicit examples of such...in this case, the Israelites had become so unfaithful that the nation was destroyed and a remnant sent into exile in Babylon—modern Iraq.
  - As we read: *"...they [had] 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."*
  - There *"was no remedy"* because they had digressed so far as to ignore God altogether.
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- But, then, as with Noah...as with the Israelites in the desert...and as with each of us...God's gives a chance for a "do-over"...in today's case by inspiring the Persian king Cyrus, who conquered Babylon, to let the Israelites return to the Promised Land and rebuild Jerusalem and, most importantly, the temple...and thus giving them opportunity to return to right worship of God.

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- There are several things to glean from that episode—themes often-repeated in the Bible.
  - First of all: not all misfortune is pointless evil. In fact, the Church takes St. Thomas Aquinas’ teaching as her own when she teaches that the entirely good God would not allow evil to occur unless He would bring a greater good from it...as difficult as it may be for us to understand at the time we suffer such evil, trial or hardship.
  - To see that, we have to realize and remember that our physical “good” is not of ultimate importance as is our spiritual good.
  - Through misfortune, and even pain, we can learn patience and realization that this world and its comforts are, at best, transient ... such realization (hopefully) leading us to a greater understanding that seeking eternal truth and life need be our goal.
  - Is this not the very kernel of the Gospel of Jesus Christ—to not be concerned for worldly happiness, but rather to do all and live our lives for the eternal joy of the embrace of God...through love of Him and love of neighbor?
  - For, as we read in 1 Peter: “...*after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, establish, and strengthen you.*” (1 Peter 5:10)

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- A second theme of our first reading today is, of course, that God gives us the grace to repent and return to Him; such grace is never withheld from us, because as Paul tells Timothy, God: “...*desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*” (1 Timothy 2:4)
  - This, of course, is the very theme of the Lenten season: Repent! Turn from evil, learn to do good. Do good, avoid evil.
  - So let us not be so foolish as to ignore God’s great good—ALL for our benefit—for the fleeting and trivial pursuits of the world...

- ...deaf to the warning of our Gospel today: “...*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...But whoever lives the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be clearly seen as done in God.*”
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- To God we owe absolutely everything good in our lives—both past, present and future...including our very lives...and, most of all, including eternal life.
- Thus that obligation—the inescapable requirement—to obey our Father and Creator, just as children have the obligation to obey their parents—their physical “creators”, so to speak...without whom they would not even exist, and who nurture and care for them. This is not only love, it is simply justice.
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- If we not follow that road of goodness that He has shown to us, we do not attain eternal life...and then our lives would be not only in vain, but self-destructive...and we risk not temporal exile, but eternal exile from all joy...all good...all love.
- And so, as we come to Laetare Sunday—“praise” Sunday—which marks having come halfway through our Lenten season...and with just two weeks until Palm Sunday and the beginning of Holy Week, and now only three weeks until Easter...let us renew our resolve to follow Our Lord wholeheartedly.
- “*For God so love the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but have eternal life.*”
- Thus God gives us assurance that those who proceed through life in faith will attain eternal life with Him...that life which is, if nothing else, being enfolded in God’s love for eternity.

Reading 1

[2 Chr 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!"

Responsorial 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.

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

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!"

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

How could we sing a song of the LORD  
in a foreign land?

If I forget you, Jerusalem,  
may my right hand be forgotten!

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

May my tongue cleave to my palate  
if I remember you not,  
If I place not Jerusalem  
ahead of my joy.

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

Reading II

[Eph 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**

[Jn 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.