

Homily by Canon Philip Dyson: Sunday 14th March 2021

4th (Laetare) Sunday in Lent

Readings (Year B): 1st: 2 Chronicles 36:14-16. 19-23. Psalm 136.
2nd: Ephesians 2:4-10. Gospel: John 3:14-21

What a line from 1st reading: ‘**there was no further remedy!**’
That is the verdict of the Chronicler on the exile to Babylon (Iraq)
The reading is a watershed moment in Israel’s history.

Prophet after prophet called the leaders of the kingdom to return to the moral anchor of their covenant with God, but Israel’s unfaithfulness has led to their destruction and seventy years of exile from Jerusalem. Then God uses an unlikely source – Cyrus, the king of Persia, (Iran) a non Jew, a gentile, to restore and rebuild.

The Psalm is the soul-wrenching lament of refugees forced from their beloved home and into slavery. The exiles of Jerusalem vow to remember the land they left behind and to never lose hope in the Lord who does not forget them. The only path to peace and piety is by return to what has been lost: the land, the worship, the Temple.

God’s wish to ‘spare his people’ had shown itself through the guidance of the Law, the prophets and the Temple consecration. But infidelity to the covenant and imitation of pagan shameful practices meant severe measures of purification.

The exile is viewed through the eyes of Jeremiah – a return to the days of the Sinai wilderness when Israel could be proud of only her God.

Jesus meeting with Nicodemus is also a watershed moment in all history. In his questioning Nicodemus is welcomed by Jesus with understanding and compassion.

To Nicodemus – and to all of us – Jesus reveals a God of life and restoration, who constantly seeks our healing and reconciliation with him and with one another.

The God Jesus reveals is not the God of condemnation and destruction, but the God of forgiveness, mercy, compassion and eternal life. God is detached neither from us nor the universe, his creation; for he constantly seeks to create and nurture life, to heal the broken-hearted, to raise up the fallen. Here is the great truth. Here in fact is the remedy. The answer of Jesus to Nicodemus, is a summary of the whole economy of salvation in three movements:

1. Jesus came down from above to our level of life in order to raise us up to share in his divine life.
2. The great power behind all this is God's love for the world
3. Our co-operation with God's grace is required, through our willingness to walk in the light of Christ's way.

The gospel in a nutshell: God loved the world so much that he gave his only son. God's love is the dynamic principle for the world's salvation; so much so that he gave. No object is sufficient for the love of God short of the world itself. God loves his world. The world and its marvels did not come into being by chance or accident: it is the creation of God's wisdom and love. Part of our faith is a love and care for creation, for the creator loves it and us within it.

Christianity is not one more religion of individual salvation, differing from its fellows only in offering a different road to that goal. It is the one and only religion of world redemption. Its scope is as wide as can be; as wide as the love of God: the sin of the world that Christ takes away.

Thus is opened up a new conception of the Son of Man and the Day of the Lord. Devout Jews looked forward to the coming of the Son of Man as meaning redemption for themselves, but judgement for the world. It is not so. Judgement may be, must be, an incidental consequence of the coming: but its purpose is salvation for all the world; "for God sent his Son into the world not to condemn the world, but so that thorough him the world might be saved.

The simple message that God is love and he gave. The greatest

symbol of love isn't the heart but the cross, because while every heart will stop beating, the cross of Christ is an eternal, infinite testimony that God so loved that he gave.

Jesus always pointed to his cross as the central event of his life because lifted on the cross he, who had no sin, took upon himself the sin of every human being, past, present and future.

In doing so he reconciled us to the Father. **Jesus is the remedy.**