

## Homily Notes for Sunday, March 11, 2018, 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent

Readings: 2 Chron 36:14-16, 19-23; Eph 2:4-10; John 3:14-21

**1. Summary:** The central theme of today's readings is that God's judgment on our personal and communal sin can be overcome through our faith in and obedience to Jesus. Our salvation is the free gift of a merciful God given to us by faith through Jesus His Son with the purpose that we fulfill the "works" that he has planned for us. The readings stress God's mercy and compassion, the great love, kindness and grace extended to us in Christ, even after the very serious punishment we deserve for our sins. As an act of love and gratitude to God who is "*rich in mercy*", we are invited to review the state of our faith and to share his sufferings by doing penance during Lent so that we may inherit our eternal salvation and the glory of his resurrection in heaven.

**2. In the first reading** from the Second Book of Chronicles, we learn the compassion and patience of God. God allowed Cyrus the Great, a pagan conqueror, to become the instrument of His mercy and salvation to His chosen people who were in exile in Babylon. This is a very sobering reading. This reading highlights the consequences of unfaith and rebellion. Today's gospel contains this lament of John the evangelist: "*The light came into the world, but people preferred darkness to light.*" The chronicler in the first reading says the same thing about the chosen people long ago: "*But they mocked the messengers of God, despised his warnings, and scoffed at his prophets.*" We need to remember this sober warning.

**3. Background to the Book of Chronicles.** On the surface the Book of Chronicles appears to be a parallel to the books of Samuel and of Kings. In reality, it is the only instance of Hebraic *philosophy of history* presented on an immense scale. It begins with material from Genesis and concludes with the return of the Jewish people from Exile in Babylonia. But, more so, it is a theology, powerfully and persuasively inculcating three fundamental doctrines;

- 1). That all human life exists under the overruling of an immutable moral order ordained by God;
- 2). That observance of rightful forms of worship and morality is of paramount importance for the community;
- 3). And that God's revelation is given not only in past time but in the present - a living Word of truth.

### **4. The conclusion, given in this morning's reading (vv. 14-16).**

"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."

**5. The theology of the Chronicler** is that God has a moral order by which he will bless his people if it is obeyed and by which he will rain down wrath and destruction if it is violated. This reminds us of the "Two Ways" referred to by Moses in **Deut 30:15-20**. Our blessings as a nation, our prosperity, and our freedoms are all dependent on our obedience of the laws of God. Is this "our" story, the "story" that defines reality for us?

**6. In the second reading:** Paul teaches that, although we don't deserve anything from God on our own merits, God chose to love, save and give life to us - both Jewish and Gentile Christians - because of His great mercy and love. Paul tells us that God is so rich in mercy that He has granted **to those who believe in Jesus** eternal salvation and eternal life as a free gift through Christ Jesus. Note that works have a role in our salvation. We are not saved by our works but we cannot be saved without them. To think we could be saved by our works, without grace, is heresy, Pelagianism.

**7. Apologetics:** When someone quotes from Eph 2:8-10 to prove that works have nothing to do with salvation, make sure that they read v. 10 also,

"We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

And if we don't, we would be disobedient (See Matt 7:21-27).

**8. Today's Gospel. Here we have the basics of the Gospel. God sent his Son into the world not to condemn the world but that the world might be saved through him.** We must believe in and obey Jesus to be saved.

Hence verses 19-21 in the Gospel reading which show the necessity to walk in the Light as opposed to the love of darkness: When we walk according to the teachings of Christ, we are walking in the Light. If we oppose these teachings, we oppose Christ himself and hence we are walking in darkness. John is very clear.

“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.”

We must note that to “believe” is not just an intellectual affirmation but requires obedience to God. Note the parallel at the end of John 3, v 36.

“Whoever believes in the son has eternal life, but whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God remains upon him.”

In today's text we are told that *Light has come into the world, but people loved the darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.* How true is this today? There are so many dark corners in our world. Addiction to alcohol, drugs, gambling, deceit and dissembling, political lies and corruption, pornography and all the sexual sins. It is so easy to pretend that these dark corners don't exist or that they really aren't darkness! Today is there not confusion of what is right and wrong? Are we not often being taught that evil things are good and right and things that are right and good are bad?

**9. Are we so accustomed to evil and corruption that we just tolerate it?** We can act like the desert nomad in the story who woke up hungry in the middle of the night. He lit a candle and began eating dates from a bowl beside his bed. He took a bite from one and saw a worm in it; so he threw it out of the tent. He bit into the second date, found another worm, and threw it away also. Reasoning that he wouldn't have any dates left to eat if he continued to look for worms, he blew out the candle and quickly ate the rest of the dates! Is this like our use of credit cards or indiscriminate use of student loans? Is this the way we tolerate gross immorality in our entertainment industry and the teaching of immoral and perverse values in our public education? Is this the way we look at the moral laws of God?

**10. But we are called to a living witness in our world. I want to close with a practical example of wise judgment. “Ten dollars or ten days in jail”:** James N. McCutcheon tells a wonderful story about the sense of justice of Fiorello LaGuardia, based on God's mercy and generosity as expressed in today's gospel. LaGuardia was mayor of New York City during the worst days of the Great Depression and during all of World War II. He was a colorful character who used to ride the New York City fire trucks, raid speakeasies with the police department, and take entire orphanages to baseball games. Whenever the New York newspapers were on strike, he used to go on radio and read the Sunday "funnies" to the kids. One bitterly cold night in January of 1935, the mayor turned up at a night court that served the poorest ward of the city. LaGuardia dismissed the judge for the evening and took over the bench himself. Within a few minutes, a tattered old woman was brought before him, charged with stealing a loaf of bread. She told LaGuardia that her daughter's husband had deserted her, her daughter was sick, and her grandchildren were starving -- but the shopkeeper, from whom the bread was stolen, refused to drop the charges. "It's a bad neighborhood, your Honor," the man told the mayor. "She's got to be punished to teach other people around here a lesson." LaGuardia sighed. He turned to the woman and said "I've got to punish you...The law makes no exceptions - ten dollars or ten days in jail." But even as he pronounced the sentence, the mayor was already reaching into his pocket. He extracted a bill and tossed it into his familiar hat, saying, "Here's the ten dollar fine which I now remit; and furthermore, I'm going to fine everyone in this courtroom fifty cents for living in a town where a person has to steal bread so that her grandchildren can eat. Mr. Bailiff, collect the fines and give them to the defendant." The following day, the New York City newspapers reported that forty-seven dollars and fifty cents was turned over to the old woman who had stolen a loaf of bread to feed her starving grandchildren.

**11. We wonder if that could happen today!** Would we be sharp enough to pull off something like this? Can we be salt and light for our culture?

**What does our ministry here at St. Boniface need to be to inspire faith, holiness, godliness as well as wisdom and mercy as we deal with our members and our community?**