

## Lent 4

In today's first reading from Chronicles, we learn how God's chosen people – Judah - refused to listen to God's Word given through His prophets. Their lives were not a witness to the nations around them, instead they sought to fit in and to be like their neighbors, who worshiped other gods they placated even with child sacrifice. The consequence was a long moral, social, and political decline that culminated in Judah being conquered by a neighboring empire. The Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed. But even their lack of faithfulness could not break the Covenant that God had with them. The survivors, many of whom were taken off into exile to what is now Iraq, recovered their faith, found their moral compass again, and were willing to be witnesses, to be different. King Cyrus, was so deeply impressed by their life of faith that he too becomes a believer in their God. He orders them to return to Jerusalem after a seventy-year exile to re-build the Temple and to pray for him and his family. Cyrus knew that as a Persian he could never directly belong to God's covenant people. That was only for the physical descendants of Abraham and Sarah and those adopted into the family by circumcision or marriage. But Cyrus acknowledged the God of Israel as the source of his own wellbeing.

In today's Gospel from John – we hear of an encounter 500 years later – between Jesus and Nicodemus, one of the religious leaders from Jerusalem who were questioning the validity of what Jesus was doing. Jesus tells Nicodemus: God's covenant love was always meant to extend to all peoples, not just to His chosen people. "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that everyone who believes in him might not perish but have eternal (divine) life." Through Jesus, a new covenant is offered to all peoples who will believe in Him. To believe in Jesus means to believe that He will do what He promises: restore us to right relationship with God and each other, give us victory over sin in our lives. Jesus is the light of God come into the world. The light of Jesus' goodness and holiness reveals our own shortcomings, but Jesus says He did not come to condemn us but to save us. Many people have the mistaken idea that God only cares about grave sins. But that was not what Jesus taught. He cares just as much about our weakness and failings, patterns like: overuse of food, chemical substances, gambling, computers/videogaming, overwork, procrastination, being too

controlling, being too compliant, being arrogant, not standing up for ourselves, low self-esteem, greediness, being judgmental toward others - or toward myself.

Remember how in the Sermon on the Mount, He said “You have heard it said ‘you shall do no murder’ but I say to you if defame a person’s reputation you are committing a kind of murder. And, you have heard it said “you shall not commit adultery” but I say when your heart is unchaste, you have already taken that path.

Our weaknesses are often what causes us problems in our daily lives. These habits and patterns are deeply imbedded in our personalities and are very hard to change. Often, we don’t even see our failings but more easily notice those of others, especially when they have the very weakness we do! They undermine our happiness and our relationships. They undermine the integrity of our Christian witness.

The very best of us – can only approach God on the basis of His mercy, not our deserving, and seek His help in overcoming areas of weakness or imbalance in our character. God is the one whose grace can bring us victories with these but often only with patience and time. Jesus invites us to come into the light and allow Him to show us these areas so that they can be healed.

St. Paul summarizes well Jesus’ teachings: God who is rich in mercy offers us divine life in Christ. God does not hold our weaknesses and failings against us, when we look upon the Son as our Savior in faith. He will enable us to overcome our failings in time so that we may love God, ourselves, and our neighbors more fully. We become God’s handiwork, His children. We become the witnesses to those around us of the power and love of God. Let’s not run from His light lest our weaknesses be exposed, rather let’s trust and allow Him to bring about His victory in our lives.