

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

March 14, 2021 B

Facilitator: *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.*

Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *God of our ancestors, we thank you for gathering us together in your name, we thank you for continuing to be patient with us when we fail to follow your ways. Help us during this Lenten journey to commit ourselves more fully to you. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Response to last week's Word: [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week.*

Facilitator reads focus statement: The first reading speaks of Israel's infidelities to God despite his "early and frequent" outreach to them. The second and third readings emphasize that our salvation is a *free gift* which we can accept or reject.

Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is he wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.

Read the First Reading, the Psalm, and the Second Reading, pausing briefly after each one.

FIRST READING: 2 Chronicles 36:14-16, 19-23

The author of the two books of Chronicles judges Israel's kings and people according to their fidelity or infidelity to their covenant with God. In this reading, which has three parts to it, we first hear about the people's outright infidelity to God despite his mercy and warnings to change. In the second part, we hear how God finally "loses his cool" with Israel. The Chaldeans are God's instrument of punishment. The Israelites' beloved Jerusalem and temple are destroyed. Many people are killed. Survivors are carried off to Babylon to live in exile and slavery. The reading ends on a note of hope – a new pagan king named Cyrus issues a decree permitting the exiles to return home and rebuild their city and temple.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 137

This psalm is sometimes called "*The Song of the Exile.*" It gives us a vivid description of how the Israelites felt during their exile in Babylon.

SECOND READING; Ephesians 2:4-10

In these beautiful verses, Paul calls to mind God's amazing mercy and grace, which raises us up from the death that comes through sin. Our salvation is pure gift. We can do nothing to earn it. But we can thank God for his saving grace by living lives filled with good works. Commenting on these verses, William Barclay writes: "*All the good works in the world*

cannot put you right with God; but there is something radically wrong with the Christian life that does not express itself in good works."

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: John 3:14-21

As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.

**A participant reads the Gospel,
then all pause to reflect.**

As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.

GOSPEL: John 3:14-21

On their way through the desert, many of the Israelites are bitten by serpents and some of them die. At God's command, Moses makes a bronze serpent and mounts it on a pole. Whoever looks at the serpent is healed. Likewise, all who look to Christ with faith and repentance will be saved. Believing in Christ is a choice to live in the light. We can open our hearts to the light or we can reject the light. The choice is ours. Acceptance of the light will lead us to heaven. Rejection of the light will lead us to eternal damnation. In reality, God sends no one to hell. It is something we opt for by deliberately and consciously choosing to live our lives without God.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Share with the group or person next to you what spoke to you most in the Gospel. With this first question, try to refrain from commenting on what others said. Just share what spoke to you and then move on to the next person.
2. This Sunday's Gospel has John's famous 3:16 verse: "*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.*" What has helped you to come to believe in God's unconditional love for you? What in the past or present made it hard for you to believe in God's unconditional love?
3. Some, if not many, Christians have a difficult time squaring God's unconditional love with belief in hell. What are your thoughts on this?
4. Nicodemus comes to see Jesus at night so that his colleagues would not know of his interest in Jesus. Many Catholics are very quiet about their faith. What has or is helping you to be more public about your Catholic faith?
5. Name one thing today's Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed and act on.

JOURNALING

Having listened to God's Word and listened to others' reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as he asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.

PRAYING WITH THE WORD

Facilitator: Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: *Dear Jesus, I believe in your unconditional love for me, help me to believe and respond unconditionally.*

RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week's readings. Suggestion: If you still act as if you have to *earn* your salvation, try to change your mindset. Instead see your actions as a response to a God who loves you very much. If you have quit on your Lenten resolutions, start up again. If you have been faithful, praise God for the grace of fidelity.

CONCLUDING PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we need to pray? Pray for all who suffer from a hardened heart and have no desire to seek God and his ways. Pray for our Elect. Pray that God gives you opportunities to share your talk, or talk about religion with people whom you would not normally do this with.

CLOSING PRAYER (Together)

*Thank you, God of love,
for loving us so much
that you sent your Son to save us.
Free us from any tendencies we have
toward believing we must earn our salvation.
Help us to cooperate with your grace.
This we pray through Christ our Lord.
Amen.*