

Homily for 4th Sunday Lent B

God is a bit like the guest preacher who stepped up to the pulpit and addressed the congregation with these words: "As I understand it, my job is to preach and your job is to listen. If you finish before I do, please let me know." God hears the cries of his people and in love - answers them. Our first reading of this Sunday presents to us, the wrath and the mercy of God. These are revealed in both, the exile and liberation of his people. Three complaints were made against Israel and their leaders. These include: "That they were unfaithful; they defiled the temple; and, they laughed at the prophets." This merited them deportation and exile. A drastic remedy was required. Conquest and captivity brought the humiliation of defeat and the remorse that comes from recognizing the goodness they had lost. Today's Psalm reminds us of this remorse — longing for home and its beauty -- even its music -- which was beyond their reach. In this story, mercy came through the motivation of an outsider-king, who grants a reprieve from this captivity and allows these people to return to their land and rebuild their temple. Query – who do you think motivated that king? Sometimes mercy comes from unlikely sources. *Bill was a frequent user of a pay telephone at a popular truck stop, and was greatly inconvenienced when the phone went out of commission. Repeated requests for repair brought only promises. After several days, Bill again contacted the phone company and told them there was no longer a rush. The phone was now working fine... except that all money was being returned upon completion of each call. A repairman arrived within the hour!*

Stories with second chances encourage us, as we know that we often need them. Many of us know firsthand about going our own way when it is not the right way. Perhaps we did not deliberately start out with the wrong path in mind, but we made some bad choices. And when we added more bad choices, we may have found ourselves further from home than we had anticipated. We found it hard to return to the good path, perhaps even doubting whether we belonged there at all. In the second reading, Paul reminds us of our terrible state and what God did in order to redeem us. The people of Israel when they sinned in the wilderness prayed to the Lord to take away the snakes that were afflicting them - and they were given a sign by which they could be saved if they but gazed upon it. We too are given a sign, by which we are saved - when we look upon it and believe. Of course - without that looking and the repentance it implies - without faith - without an attempt to walk by the light - the grace of God is of little use to us. *Marvin, was in the hospital on his death bed. The family called Marvin's Preacher to be with him in his final moments. As the Preacher stood by the bed, Marvin's condition seemed to deteriorate, and Marvin motioned for someone to quickly pass him a pen and paper. The Preacher quickly got a pen and paper and lovingly handed it to Marvin. But before he had a chance to read the note, Marvin died. The Preacher feeling that now wasn't the right time to read it put the note in his jacket pocket. It was at the funeral while speaking that the Preacher suddenly remembered the note. Reaching deep into his pocket the Preacher said "and you know what, I suddenly remembered that right before Marvin died he handed me a note, and knowing Marvin I'm sure it was something inspiring that we can all gain from. With that introduction the Preacher ripped out the note and opened it. The note said "HEY, YOU ARE STANDING ON MY OXYGEN TUBE!"*

Indeed, this gospel warns those who think they can believe but persist in doing wrong. Our faith should not stay in our head. It should be reflected in our hearts, arms, legs, fingers, and toes as we do works that proceed from love of God and love of neighbour, which St. Augustine described as medicine that we need from the Church. The Church is indeed a hospital for sinners, and we must come with a desire to become well, not merely to reflect on our symptoms. Lord, we need your mercy. Grant that we might heed your warnings when we leave the path, and return promptly.

Duck Food...

A duck walks into a bar and says "Do you have duck food here?"

The bartender says "No" and the duck leaves.

The duck comes back the next day and says "Do you have duck food?"

The bartender says "No."

The duck comes back the next day and says "Do you have any duck food?" The bartender says "I already told you 'No' twice! If you come back and ask me again, I'm going to nail your feet to the floor!"

The duck comes back the next day and says "Do you have any nails?"

The bartender says "No."

"Do you have any duck food?"