

March 11, 2018

Fourth Sunday in Lent - "B" Cycle

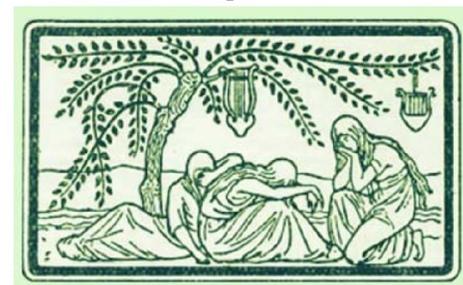
Readings can be obtained from: <http://uscgb.org/bible/readings/031118-year-b.cfm>

Saint John Ogilvie: <https://www.franciscanmedia.org/saint-john-ogilvie/>

Readings: 2 Chronicles 36: 14-16, 19-23; Psalm 137: 1-2, 3, 4-5, 6;
Ephesians 2: 4-10; John 3: 14-21

Our readings speak of GOD's gifting of the Holy People and the People's need to respond to GOD's gifts. The passage from Hebrew scripture, which is used as our first reading, describes the Exile in Babylon and their release from Exile. It is GOD Who gifts the Chosen People with freedom by using a gentile ruler. The psalm describes the importance of the Babylonian exiles' remembering how GOD had graced the Holy City of Jerusalem. In remembering (*zikkaron*), the people pray for, and look forward to, the time when GOD will again grace them with a return to the Holy City. In the Second Reading, Saint Paul describes the ultimate gift of GOD: eternal life with Risen Lord Jesus and His *Abba*-Father. In the Gospel, we have the often quoted summary of the gift of salvation: "GOD so love the world that GOD sent the Only Son, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him."

The Hebrew priestly author of Second Chronicles proceeds to relate the history of GOD's interaction with the Chosen People. In today's passage, he describes the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, the Exile in Babylon, the release from captivity through King Cyrus of Persia, and Cyrus' edict to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. These verses encompass a span of seventy or so years. To the priestly historian this passage once again demonstrates GOD's love for the People of GOD. Again and again GOD graces the people with another chance – another covenant. The people are reminded it is not their doing that restores them to their homeland, it is GOD's action, this time through a non-Jewish ruler. The presumption is that after GOD has graced the people with sign of divine love, the people will in turn freely respond to GOD's gifts and be faithful to the renewed relationship covenant.



<https://psalmslife.files.wordpress.com/2013/11/psalm137-400.jpg>

a gift – a gift from GOD. Salvation originates in GOD's eternal and flows from the death and resurrection of Jesus. This gift or grace of salvation is faith. And faith, being a gift, is not something we produce. It is purely and simply the work of GOD. We can respond to the gift and show our acceptance by living faithful lives – lives full of faith. Our actions, then, are not causes of our receiving grace, but responses to the grace with which we have been gifted.



<http://www.serviciohebraico.org/correo/dibujos/dibujos22cuaremaB4.jpg>

The plight of the exiles in Babylon is recalled in Psalm 137. The people lament their plight. They cannot sing the joyful songs of the LORD when they are not in the presence of GOD as was manifested in the Temple in Jerusalem. Yet, as they remember the specialness of Jerusalem and the blessings they had once had, they pray that their remembering (*zikaron*) will lead to their eventual return not just to Jerusalem, but also to the covenant relationship that the Temple had signified.

In his letter to the Ephesians, St. Paul speaks about the grace of salvation. This grace cannot be earned by actions or works. It is, as the word "grace" means,

For it is by *Grace* you have
been saved through *Faith*.
And this is not from yourselves,
It is the *Gift of God*.

Ephesians 2:8

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In the Gospel, Jesus summarizes His purpose for becoming human, living, teaching, suffering, dying, and resurrecting – because GOD so loved the world. Once again it is GOD's action of love that begins the process of salvation. Jesus has come not to condemn the world, but to save it. We are reminded that we do not deserve to be saved, we deserve to be condemned for our sins. GOD, however, loves us so much that we are given yet other chances to accept the grace of GOD's very life. Jesus wants us to be "bound once again" (*re-ligio*) with an all-loving (yet just) GOD. That is grace. That is gift. That is GOD's doing. That's what the Covenant Relationship is: GOD choosing to love us in spite of our sinfulness.

It is interesting to me that the word "grace" has many meanings in English. The word itself comes from the Latin *gratia*, which means "gift," "favor," "loving kindness." It has also taken on the added meaning of "thankfulness" in such phrases as a "grace before meals." The Spanish form of the word, *gracias*, also has this meaning of "thanks." In all of its meanings, it implies benevolence on the part of giver and the proper response of the one to whom something is given.

GOD is the “Gracer” and we are the “graced.” GOD has gifted us not only with human life, but also with a share in divine life (another meaning of the term “grace”). We receive “sanctifying grace” or GOD’s life within us. GOD sanctifies us – makes us holy. We don’t make ourselves holy. We are truly graced, gifted, saved – by GOD. Saying the words “thank you” is not enough, especially when some people’s “thank you” is more automatic and insincere. The “thank you” GOD desires the most is “grateful” life. (Notice by the way the word, “grateful” also comes from *gratia*). Our life should reflect that we have been “graced” by GOD. Our actions should be proclamations that we have accepted the gifts which GOD has given us. People should be touched by, and experience, GOD’s gracing by our behavior. If we can live “graceful” and “grateful” lives, people will come to better “know” the love which GOD has for them.

Being “graceful” takes practice. GOD even helps in the practice of being “graceful.” GOD gives us “actual grace.” Actual graces are the helps we need to live a “graceful” life. So not only does GOD make us holy, GOD helps us to live lives which proclaim GOD’s making us holy. GOD also empowers us at key moments in our lives with “sacramental graces” – special gifts at those times in our lives when we need help to remember (*zikaron* as did the exiles in Babylon) that GOD is with us – those times when we need GOD the most.

Every aspect of our lives is touched by the grace of GOD – GOD is with us willing to gift us at every moment. And the only “grace” (thanks) GOD wants is that we are “graceful” and “grateful.” GOD wants us to freely choose to live in a way that we reflect the loving, giving, and graciousness of GOD. So instead of just holding up signs with John 3:16, GOD wants us to hold up our lives as signs which proclaim the message in that passage. People should be able to meet us and experience in the way we treat them that “GOD so loved the world that GOD sent the Only Son, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.” That is the true Covenant Relationship.

The personal question/action for today: In the past, what did “grace” mean to me? Have I come to a new understanding and experience of “grace”? When have I experienced the graciousness of GOD? How have I responded to that graciousness? How can I live a more “graceful” and “grateful” life, demonstrating my awareness of GOD’s gifts to me? What can I do to help others come to a greater appreciation of GOD’s grace in their lives?

Blessed are You, LORD GOD, ever gracious, always gifting. Through Your GoODness and graciousness, You continually manifest Your love for us. We have not always appreciated Your gifts. We have even refused to accept them and chosen false gifts which gave false promises of temporary benefits, but resulted in death and destruction. For the times we have not been “graceful” and “grateful” for Your gifts and turned our backs on Your graciousness, we seek Your pardon and forgiveness. Through the inspiration of Your Holy Spirit, helps us to reflect on Your gifts and graces, especially the greatest of all gifts – the coming of Your Son, Jesus, into our world. Although we have deserved to be condemned, He came to save us and draws into an even closer covenant relationship with You. May we respond to Your grace by living graceful lives which both give Your glory and thanks and remind others of Your gracious gifts of life, love, and salvation. As always, we unite ourselves in this prayer with Jesus, Your Son and our Brother, the Savior Who has suffered and died and rose for us, and Who is living and reigning with You and the Holy Spirit, our one and only GOD, for ever and ever. Amen.

Song of the Day: *Grace* by Phil Wickham: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vemzS9SlqeA>

Video of the Day: *St. John Ogilvie:* http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=feCY3Bn_7-E

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