

Up to now during Lent, the first readings have had some connection to covenants. Today's first reading shows us what happens when the covenants are broken. "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." This is what led to the Babylonian exile and the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple.

This reading also shows us God's patience. "Early and often did the LORD, the God of their fathers, send his messengers (the prophets) 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." God gave the people of Judah and Jerusalem plenty of warnings and time to repent, but they preferred the darkness to light and remained in their sins. Eventually God had to make good on his threats and Jerusalem and its temple were destroyed and its people carried off into captivity.

Finally, after seventy years, God inspired King Cyrus of Persia to conquer the Babylonians and once he did, Cyrus issued the proclamation which allowed the Jews to return home and rebuild their city and the temple. This is what gave rise to today's entrance antiphon: "Rejoice, Jerusalem, and all who love her. Be joyful, all who were in mourning; exult and be satisfied at her consoling breast." Quick side note: Cyrus wasn't a believer in the God of the Israelites, but that didn't stop God from working through him. God can work through whoever he chooses and through any and all situations.

What we see in that first reading and what we find perfectly fulfilled in the Gospel is how God's wrath and justice are tempered by his mercy. God sent the prophets to warn the people that if they didn't change their ways, bad things would happen. The people refused to listen and bad stuff did happen. But then God showed his mercy and allowed them to go home. He also promised them a messiah who would bring about a new kingdom. This messiah wasn't coming to restore the earthly kingdom of ancient Israel as it was at its height under King David, however; he was coming to usher in the Kingdom of Heaven. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. This is God's love and mercy displayed to its fullest extent.

Breaking a covenant with God means death to the oathbreakers. When we break a commandment by sinning, we are breaking that covenant, which we entered into through baptism, Confirmation, and by receiving the Eucharist. When we say “amen” before receiving Holy Communion, we are saying yes to all that God commands. Keeping those promises can be difficult though. God has given us a remedy for the times when we fail to keep our word to him. He sent Jesus into the world to pay the price for all our sins by dying on the cross for us...an innocent man paying the price for those who are guilty. Jesus then established the sacrament of reconciliation so that we can have access to his mercy.

Why did God do all of this? The prophet Isaiah gives us a shocking answer. The background on this is that I had a totally different homily worked out in my head for this weekend. Anytime you can bring the rock stars Bruce Springsteen, U2, The Gaslight Anthem and Dolly Parton into one homily it's gotta be great, right? The problem is that I was looking at the wrong set of readings. I had accidentally opened my daily missal up to where we left off in Ordinary time instead of where we are in Lent. The rockstar homily is going to have to wait until the year 2030 which is the next time we will have those readings. I was able to salvage a little bit from it though. At the end of the first reading for that Sunday, God, speaking through Isaiah, says: “It is I, I, who wipe out, **for my own sake**, your offenses; your sins I remember no more.” God wiping out our sins is surprising in itself, but the real shocker is that he did it for his own sake. WHY???? He loves us and he wants us to be with him in heaven forever. God's mercy is without limit. This is hard for us to comprehend because our mercy is often very limited. Not God's mercy. He wants to show us his mercy. When we refuse to ask him to forgive us, we are denying him the opportunity to show us his mercy and his love. When we refuse to ask God to forgive us, we are telling Jesus that the cross has no meaning for us. Is that the message we want to send to him?

If you need to go to Confession, but haven't yet, what are you waiting for? There are a few more opportunities to go to Confession before Easter; take advantage of them. Don't wait until the last minute. Don't tell Jesus that what he did for us means nothing to us. God's mercy and love is without limit, but we have to immerse ourselves in it for it to do us any good. God wants to forget our sins. Let's not make him wait any longer.