

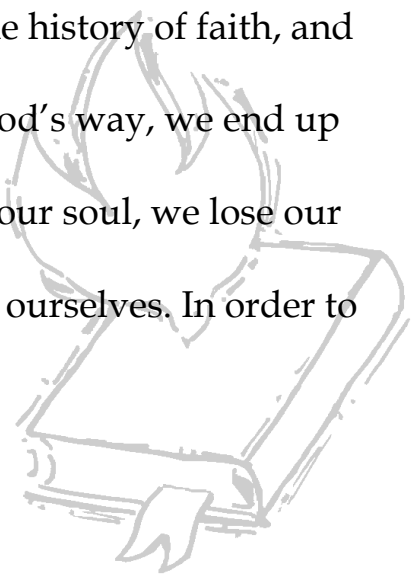
Homily
29th Sunday OT – A
Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
October 17-18, 2026

Is 45: 1-6
Ps 96: 1, 3, 4-5, 7-8, 9-10
1 Thes 1: 1-5
Mt 22: 15-21

This weekend, our homily offers you a little Old Testament scholarship and a little Old Testament history. In other words, I about to bore you on today's lesson from the book of the prophet Isaiah.

Scripture scholars would say that the book of the prophet Isaiah is split into three parts, most likely written by three different authors. The first part of Isaiah consists of Chapters 1-39. This text was written prior to the Babylonian Exile in 586 BC and served as a warning to the Chosen People. In short, Isaiah told the so-called Jewish faithful that they needed to clean up their act or they were going to lose their land.

As we have learned time and time again in the history of faith, and even in today's age, when we turn away from God's way, we end up losing what we have. We lose our faith, we lose our soul, we lose our proper disposition, and then we have to redeem ourselves. In order to



get back to the Lord's graces, we have to confess our sins, we have to ask for penance, and then we have become clean and have to start again.

Make no mistake, though – if we turn back to God, then God makes us clean; God will forgive us and we start with a clean slate. God will love us, but it requires us to have a change of heart.

So as the story goes in the prophet Isaiah, as we read this story over and over again, prior to 586 BC, the Chosen People continued to disregard the prophets. As we learned in the Northern Kingdom, God's Chosen People ignored both Amos and Hosea up north in Israel and were destroyed by Assyrian armies in 722 BC. As a result, we have no idea what happened to those who lived in the northern twelve tribes – we call them “the lost tribes of Israel.”

Down south in the Kingdom of Judah, Micah and Isaiah preached the same warnings as Amos and Micah but the Chosen People down south did not listen, either. So when the Babylonians entered the Kingdom of Judah in 586 BC, the last prophet who warned the people to change their ways or face the Lord's wrath (namely the Prophet Jeremiah), the people

did not listen to him, either. As a result, the armies of Babylon destroyed the kingdom, forcing Jeremiah to be stuck in the middle of the city to watch it burn. Jeremiah lamented, the Babylonians destroyed the sacred temple and the people were exiled in the city of Babylon (modern day Baghdad, Iraq).

We know that the Book of Jeremiah is a lament of a fallen city because people did not listen; we know that the Books of Lamentations, and Baruch continued that lament. We also know that during this period of exile from around 586-536 BC, a prophet named Ezekiel prayed by the River Chebar and also lamented what was lost, only to write about a hope that a redeemed people who turned back to the Lord would re-enter their Promised Land.

Today's reading from the Prophet most likely was written during that time of exile. Scripture scholars call this text, "Second Isaiah" (Chapter 40-55). During this fifty-year exile, the writings from Second Isaiah reference the hope of returning back to the Promised Land, which was made possible through the person of a king named Cyrus the

Persian, a man who followed the teachings of Zoroaster, not the God of Israel. Cyrus really did not have any kind of relationship with the God of the Chosen People, but Cyrus had this belief of religious tolerance and making enemies into friends.

We learn from this story that neither money nor power were going to save the Jewish people when it came to Cyrus the Persian. What we learn from this story is a lesson we still have not learned this day – if we learn how to make enemies into friends, if we learn that we may be different in so many ways but brothers and sisters in others, if you build bridges and friendships instead of burning them down, good things happen. If you do this, if we do this, if you trust and love each other, if you tell people that you care, we learn that *this* is the greatest fundraiser that helps us build; *this* is how you get back to God. *This* is how you get things done through love, not hate, love.

King Cyrus decided to love and show care for the Chosen People instead of hating them. He loved them enough, that he allowed the Chosen People to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple that was so

important to the faith. Towards this cause, Ezra as the priest assembled all the laws and stories that the people were called to follow to stay faithful to God (some scripture scholars think that Ezra was the one who assembled the stories leading back to Jerusalem's return. A Jewish leader named Nehemiah was named the governor of Jerusalem.

As we are told, about 50,000 of the Chosen People returned to Jerusalem while the rest stayed in Babylon (which parallels what happens in today's Church as well). We read how the city was rebuilt, the temple was rebuilt, and the story from Third Isaiah (Chapters 56-66) most likely were written by a third author who expressed joy in this return, referencing a light shining on the darkness that we often read in the Christmas Season.

In a sense, the story of Cyrus the Persian is a type of Thanksgiving for those who might lose hope, that an outsider not associated with our ways of praying actually can provide hope when hope seemed lost.

For a while after the Chosen People's return, especially during the time of Maccabees (when the Greek army conquered the Persians and

tried to suppress the Chosen People's way of life), the Chosen People remained strong. Then, when the Roman government took over from the Greeks, the Jewish people ran into problems, lost their faith, lost their war to the Romans and then were exiled a second time and exiled by the Roman government to the city of Jamnia (modern day Yavne in Israel).

After this exile, the Jewish people struggled horribly and were oppressed by so many different forces. It was not until 1948 that the Chosen People regained their land and their state of Israel, promised to them by God in the Book of Genesis, with a reminder that fidelity to the covenant results in the gift of that land and infidelity leads to their destruction.

That land, that very fertile adjacent to the Mediterranean Sea, is most sought after by Jews, Muslims and Christians alike. That land connects Africa to Europe and Asia to Africa. That land has been a point of battle between Jews and Christians and Muslims ever since.

Cyrus the Persian taught us an important lesson in this story – it is not by money that we find success (you cannot serve both God and money) – you find success through building bridges, by making friendships, by welcoming the outsider instead of shutting them off. Cyrus gave hope to the people not by oppressing them with a census tax, but by loving them and caring for them... and that is how we need to save our parishes and treat each other.

We save the parishes not by saying we need lots and lots of money (actually, we do need to start a foundation on which I have been droning on for a while), but everything we do in God's name starts and ends with Christian charity, because if you love your church, if you love the parish, if it is not about me, if it is not about you, if it is about God, and taking care of this community, then we serve God by taking care of what God has given us, namely, this community and this facility.

We know that in the history of St. Anne's Church, Charles Choniquy entered this area, built a church and was not faithful to Catholic teaching. As a result, he was excommunicated by the Church because of

his infidelity, took the Presbyterian Church down the street from the current building in which we pray. The Catholic faithful rebuilt the Church dedicated to St. Anne in 1872 and re-established the faith that was once lost.

In the parish's history, there have been so many people who have maintained this Church and have sustained this Church and have loved this church. We are doing the same thing in today's age. Just in the last few years, we have had to address crumbling walls, leaky roofs over at the rectory, renovating a parking lot that was not maintained. We are now having to maintain and rebuild again, just doing the best we can to take care of what we have.

If we stay true to the faith, and if we maintain what we have, and if we heed the warnings that have been given to us so that we do not fall again, then God sees what is in our heart. Yet more than likely, just like history has proven over and over again, eventually we probably will fall, because people will forget about Christian Charity – people will forget to love.

Sometimes we forget, especially in today's age, over the last fifty years with the consequences of a sexual revolution that cause great suffering in our lives as a result, the sins of the Church have been exposed, we have fallen terribly, and now we have to get back up, say we are sorry for our sins, and get back on the horse to try again. That is why I am here today to make sure that you know that I cannot give up. You cannot give up. God *never* gives up on us. That is why praying to God each week is so important, so that we stay focused on what we have and how to maintain what we have.

Let us just keep doing what we are doing in the world of Christian charity, learning the lessons of history, learning how to persevere, learning the stories of how we have fallen and how we have gotten back up to start again. If nothing else, we learn that God does not lose hope in us but, in our history, we often lose hope in God.

"Give to Caesar what is Caesars, and to God what is God's." When we do that, when we stay focused on God while being good neighbors within the parameters that our country has asked us to live, good things can

happen, because God never abandons us in this world and, if we stay true to God and maintain this faith, God carries us into the next world. Let us make sure we learn these stories and lesson well and stay faithful to them regardless of how the world responds. This is our prayer.