

# Homily For Friday of the 12th Week of Ordinary Time - Year II

## St Peter's 8:30am Mass - June 28, 2024

(Memorial - St. Irenaeus)

**2 Kings 25:1-12** "Lord, if you choose, you can make me clean."

**Psalm 137:1-** "How could we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?"

**Matthew 8:1-4** "If you choose, you can make me clean."

### Be Made Clean

#### Introduction

The people chosen by God experienced many times of great trauma and sorrow. Almost invariably, those times were preceded by a significant turning from God, not just a little bit, but an almost total abandoning of their identity and the divine heritage they had been given. They do this in favour of the gods and the practices of the world around them. I suggest that three of those times are most significantly and indelibly burned into the national psyches of those people. The first was the long period of slavery in Egypt, a time when they had been thoroughly indoctrinated by the worship of many nature gods. The third was the destruction of Jerusalem and the second temple by Rome.

In between those two is the one which is taking place as we read it in today's first reading from the 2nd book of Kings. That's the destruction of Jerusalem and the glorious first temple, which had been prepared by King David and built by King Solomon. This destruction is followed by decades of exile in Babylon. So many of the prophets we read speak of it. Many of the psalms also address it.

#### Psalm

Today's psalm is the best of those by far. It is the most poignant. It is the most beautiful in its expression of the profound sadness at what had been lost. The land of ancient Israel was the fulfilment of the promise to Abraham. It was the sign that God was faithful. To lose the land was, to them, to lose God. Their captors mocked them by asking for the songs they sang to God. They said, we can't sing about God, or to God, because he has abandoned us. He is gone, along

with the land he gave us. To lose one is to lose the other. That is still why it matters so much today.

## **2 Kings**

This tragic reading follows the early passage about the faithful King Hezekiah who was able to turn to God to protect Judah from the Assyrian invasion a century earlier. Now we have an unfaithful King Zedekiah, who does not turn to God. In fact there has been a long downward trend in the faithfulness of the people since Hezekiah. They have lost God, not because God abandoned them, but because they abandoned God. They had been warned by the prophets. Babylon represents a defeat, not of God, but of pride. Exile prophets remind the people of God's presence. Turn to him and your shame will end. It takes a couple of generations, but that's what does eventually happen.

## **Matthew**

The words of Jesus to the leprous man contain the essence of what God says to Israel once they repent and ask to be made clean. God says what he always says, to Israel, and to the Church: Of course I want to heal you. Be made clean. The humility of the sick man is an essential precursor to healing.

## **St. Irenaeus**

From the beginning, the Church was referred to as the boat of Peter. Most of the time in church history it looks like that boat is sinking. If the Church was only a human institution, we would be right to be afraid. But we know that Christ is the head of the church.

St. Irenaeus is a fantastic reminder of this reality. He was a disciple of Polycarp, who was a disciple of John the Apostle. Can you imagine how close Jesus seemed at that time? And yet, there were already threats to the Church. St. Irenaeus himself was martyred in the persecution storm that raged for the first three centuries.

One of the great comforts we can draw from this saint is how consistent has been our teaching from the beginning about the closeness of Jesus. Consider his statement about the Eucharist: "Just as bread from the earth, when it receives the invocation of God, is no longer common bread but the Eucharist, made up of two elements, one earthly and one heavenly, so also our bodies, in receiving the Eucharist, are no longer corruptible, for they have the hope of resurrection." In our participation in the Eucharist, we ask the Lord again and again: If you choose, you can make me clean. That's why that sacrament is sometimes called the repeatable sacrament of initiation. Again and again, we are initiated into the Christ who heals us.

### **Call to Conversion**

There are many threats to faith around us today. They might look different in some ways from those imposed historically on God's chosen. But they are the same at the core because they seek to destroy faith in God and in his Christ. They come from our technology dictating the way we live our lives. They come from ideologies which actively seek to destroy faith in Christ, especially where it is most visible, in the Catholic Church. Even the persecution and martyrdom of Irenaeus is being played out still in many countries where Christians are murdered.

Concluding with a thought from this powerful psalm, I wonder if we tend to think we have lost God because we are in a land that has become strange to us. How can we sing of the Lord when it looks like the enemies of the people of God seem to hold power over us? But, in the middle of all that, we might hear our own voice quietly implore the Lord: "If you choose, you can make me clean. You can cleanse me of the ways I have been tarnished by the various leprosies of the world, the ways I keep being drawn into its perverted ways and its slaveries." And we will hear our Lord say back to us: "I do choose. Be made clean." This cleansing is not just a vain hope, as if somehow the worldly powers are stronger than God's. This cleansing is ours for the asking. It is the sure promise of the saviour. Let us keep asking him to be made clean.