Reading the Signs of the Times
4th Sunday of Lent (B)
2 Chr 36:14-16, 19-23  Ps 137  Eph 2:4-10  Jn 3:14-21
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(How do we know what’s going on? How do we read the signs of the times? We could do so politically, sociologically, culturally, or economically. But, the Bible insists that the world should be read theologically—i.e., from the Gospel perspective. What is God doing and why? The readings from today are about how to do this.)

How do we read the signs of the times? Vatican II famously told us to do that in the document Gaudium et Spes (Constitution of the Church in the Modern World): “Inspired by no earthly ambition, the Church seeks but a solitary goal: to carry forward the work of Christ under the lead of the befriending Spirit... To carry out such a task, the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times” (GS, #3-4). As members of the Body of Christ, the Church, all of us are called to read what’s happening. But, how? How are we reading what’s going on in the world?

There are many interpretative guides vying for our attention. We can read the signs of the times politically focusing on the movers and shakers of history. Or, we could read the signs sociologically. What are the great trends going on in our society. Or, we could follow Karl Marx and read the signs economically, in which money is the driving force of everything in society. What all of these frameworks have in common is that they’re attempting to read the world through some kind of lens and prison culture is no different.

O.K., how did God’s Chosen People, the Israelites read “the signs of the times”? Ancient Israel, as we heard in the first reading, was reading the world primarily about what God was doing and why? That’s the basic, fundamental questions we’re all called to ask: by extension, we may ask what is God doing at Folsom Prison and why? Like the Israelites, we’re challenged to read reality theologically or we can do it through the soul-sapping prism of prison culture. Obviously, you’re in prison culture, but are you of it? Some are; some aren’t. Where do you stand? Are you for Jesus or against Him? What is the primary lens by which you experience Life?

The Israelites did it theologically. So, what is a “theological perspective?” During the early 60s, the Catholic Church held its 21st ecumenical council. The last document (of 16) that the Conciliar Fathers proclaimed was Gaudium et Spes which teaches us that we read the sign of the times through and interpret them “in the light of the Gospel” (#4), which is the Word of the Lord. Jesus is the ultimate interpretative lens by which we understand Reality because as St. Paul proclaims in his letter to the Colossians, “He is the image of the invisible God” (v. 1:15a). That is why Jesus is the sole and universal Savior of the world, which St. John affirms in today’s gospel reading: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life” (Jn 3:16).

Brothers, this is where the rubber hits the road spiritually. We either gather with Jesus or we scatter. “Gathering in Jesus” is much more than professing that Jesus is Lord, which is a good start. Believing in Jesus is to enter into a shared life with Him. To believe in Jesus is to share what Jesus is sharing, which is the dynamic Love of the triune God. To believe in Jesus is to enter into the Jesus mystery—the Jesus experience. To believe in Jesus does not happen in the top 3” of your body, to believe in Him is to hand over your life to him, to surrender, and share your life completely with Him.

How do we do this? How do we walk with Jesus while being in prison? The Way to