

Out of Exile and into the Son's Light
March 14, 2021, Fourth Sunday of Lent
Gospel of John 3:14-21
Fr. John

In the northern part of our country above the Arctic Circle from around the beginning of December until late in January, the sun does not appear above the horizon. There is darkness 24 hours a day. For us, who live in more southern areas, the hours of daylight are shortened to encompass most of the working hours of the day. So, when the sun does appear above the horizon or our daylight hours noticeably expand, we begin to feel more alive, more hopeful and our spirits are raised as our exile into darkness begins to lift. Perhaps, this year, there is an added sense of hope as we finally foresee a gradual end to the kind of exile that the Covid-19 virus has placed on us.

All of this perhaps brings home to us the feelings of the Jewish people when their 70 years of exile in Babylon was coming to an end. Their spiritual fatigue and sense of longing for their homeland is reflected in today's psalm: 'By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion... How could we sing a song of the Lord in a foreign land?' Yes - there would be light at the end of the tunnel!

However, while we might rejoice in a return from the exile of a winter darkened by lack of sunlight and a pandemic, the kind of light that Jesus speaks of to Nicodemus in today's gospel reading may not be so welcomed. Too much light exposes too much of what we would rather keep in the dark. The Covid pandemic, for example, would eventually bring to light many of the weaknesses in our system of healthcare especially to the elderly. The development of the Covid vaccines exposed much political and ideological division and mistrust - even among close friends.

In our personal lives, we do not relish the thought of exposing our darker sides to the light of God's mercy and forgiveness. This is perhaps why the Sacrament of Reconciliation, one of the more neglected of our sacraments - becomes the key as to whether we prefer darkness to light. Even aside from confessing our sins in the presence of a priest we are afraid of venturing into that part of our personhood of which we are least proud. Afraid that in doing so, we will self-destruct. We often judge ourselves in the way that most other people, we feel, would judge us if they knew what we are really like. But that's not the way that God works. Did not Jesus remind Nicodemus: 'Indeed God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him.'

In many ways, the exiles that we experience are self-imposed insofar as we prefer the darkness of our fears to the liberating light of God's mercy and love.

In my younger years, I had some of those fears - fears that the priest would judge me, - fears that God would single me out as the worst of sinners, - fears that I could never be forgiven. However, over the years as both a confessOR and a confessEE, I have come

to a much fuller and greater appreciation of the sacrament of Reconciliation and what God is offering to us.

So as we look forward to the restoration of many of the freedoms and privileges that we previously enjoyed before the Covid pandemic hit, we also might also look forward to the opportunities that the Lenten season gives us to restore our relationships with God and with others.

Many look forward to hugging those from whom they have been separated for so many months. So we might also look forward to God hugging us and welcoming us back from our self-imposed exiles.

It's time to walk out of the darkness and into the Son's light.