

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

2 Chr 36; Ps 137; Eph 2; Jn 3

We can read this Sunday's readings keeping in mind last Sunday's readings and what our little commentary said about them, for a connection can be made. Our first reading is from the last book of the Jewish Bible, the Book of Chronicles, and its ending is very significant for both Jew and Gentile.

The Jewish Bible —our "Old Testament," but with the books in a different order, the order which Jesus used and which I think is more theologically significant— ends by speaking of "exile," historically referring to the deportation of the Jews to Babylon. But "exile," as we pray in the Salve Regina, is really anything short of final salvation; we are still the poor, exiled ("banished") children of Eve. The Jew, who does not believe that Jesus was the Messiah, clearly views himself as being in exile, even if he were to return to the Holy Land before Messiah came. And the very ending of the Jewish Bible is about returning to the Holy Land to rebuild God's temple (destroyed by the Babylonians in 587 B.C.). But the temple was indeed rebuilt, only to be destroyed again by the Romans in 70 A.D. So for the Jews, the ending of their Bible is still valid: the hope of really *returning* to a free, paradise-like Holy Land without violence, and enjoying God's presence in the new, indestructible temple built by Messiah himself (Zec 6:12-13) remains alive.

If one is in exile, in biblical terms one is in the "desert" or "wilderness," a place for suffering, meditation, being put to the test. It was in the desert that Israel grumbled and complained against God's plan of freedom, and the Lord sent fiery serpents to attack them. Moses made a bronze serpent and placed it on an ensign-pole, and this became the figure or type of Jesus on the cross: whoever looks at the Pierced One with faith shall live (cf. Nm 21:8; Jn 19:37; Gal 3:1; Rv 1:7). Jesus was "lifted up" on the cross. Being "lifted up" is a pun which only works in Aramaic, Jesus' language: it means both "to be glorified" (Is 52:13) and to be crucified (Jn 12:32-33; cf. Ezr 6:11). And since Jesus has gone back up to the Father whence he came, he takes us up with him and, as the reading from Ephesians says, he has sat us with him in the heavens. This is truly a wonderful fulfillment of the Jewish Bible's final words, "*go up*" (often put in the wrong order in many translations).