

Readings: *2 Chronicles 36:14 – 16,19 – 23; Ps. 136(137):1 – 6; Ephesians 2:4 – 10; John 3:14 – 21.*

The fourth of the covenants which God established with his chosen was the one made with David (see for example *2 Samuel 7* or *Psalms 88/89*). Included in this covenant was the establishment of Jerusalem as the holy city of God, and of the temple as his house on earth (see *2 Kings 8* and *Psalms 83/84*). The psalms contain several references to the believer's love for the temple, the place where *the God of gods will be seen*.

The first part of today's Old Testament Reading summarises the sins of Israel which led God to abandon his temple, allow the destruction of his holy city, and send the leaders of Israel into exile in Babylon. Psalm 136/137 speaks of the sorrows of the exiles, and suggests their longing to return to Jerusalem. In the second part of the OT reading we hear of the decree of King Cyrus to allow the rebuilding of the temple. The writer of Chronicles – as is usual in scripture – ascribes this decision to the direct action of the God of Israel.

This Fourth Sunday of Lent is known as *Laetare*, from the first word of the Entrance Antiphon: *Rejoice, Jerusalem, and all who love her*. For Christians the physical city and temple of Jerusalem have been replaced by *the Jerusalem which is above* (Galatians 4:26). We are citizens of that city (Philippians 3:20), and *fellow citizens with the saints* (Ephesians 2:19).

The Church on earth, with its sacraments and communal worship, is a sign and pledge of that heavenly city. That is why the limitations placed on public worship during the pandemic (whether by government decree or by medical necessity) are a serious matter. They exclude some Christians from receiving the Blessed Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ, from the sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Anointing, and from the fellowship of fellow believers. Of course, we are not cut off from the presence of God – it's simply that it is harder to be faithful in our discipleship without the God-given means of grace.

From today's theme we might pick out one of the following for prayer: If we are not able to join in common worship, we might express our sorrow by praying one of the psalms 42 (43), 83 (84) or 136 (137) verses 1 – 6. We can pray for an end to the pandemic, for all deprived of the sacraments, and that the life of the Church will be more clearly a sign of the heavenly city.