

GOOD NEWS

When the Jewish refugees were leaving Jerusalem for Babylon (the first deportation in 597 BC) they wondered whether they would ever return. The false prophets promised that in two years time they would be back (Jer 28:3-4). The exile took much longer - over 70 years as predicted by Jeremiah (Jer 25:11). During those years, the children of the refugees settled down in the place of their exile. They married, had children, plant gardens, and prayed for the welfare of Babylon (Jer 29:5-7). In that situation the “gospel of Isaiah” - our first reading today - finds them. They could return home, to the land their parents were forced to leave; the time of penance had ended.

Saint Mark begins his Good News with a sentence: “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mark 1:1). This beginning was marked by the appearance of John the Baptist announcing the possibility of returning to God. In the case of John, it is not only his message that is important, but also the place it was delivered. That desert represents freedom and the river of Jordan the gate to the promised land (Joshua 3:1-17). Through the Baptist, God again calls His people into the wilderness to speak to their hearts (Hosea 2:16). In the next act of Mark’s Gospel, Jesus Christ will enter the stage offering the transforming power of baptism with the Holy Spirit.

The second reading is addressed to those who already experienced the baptism with the Holy Spirit. From the risen and glorified Christ, they have received the grace of faith. Now they await and even try to hasten the last act of the Gospel - “new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13). But why does Christ delay His coming? The apostle Peter explains that what seems like a delay is not a delay at all - time is relative for God. Moreover, the delay of Christ’s coming to judge the living and the dead is the sign of God’s mercy. God is “not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

“Good News” is the main theme of the liturgy of the Word. We can return home, to the roots of our faith, to God. We have been living in the exile of sin far too long, we have forgotten our Christian identity, and we have begun to doubt God’s promises. Isaiah announces that our slavery has ended. John the Baptist helps us to revisit our glorious past, those times we experienced God’s providen-

tial care and knew that nothing was impossible with God. Saint Peter points us to the future. God gives us time to renew our commitment to a life of holiness and piety, so we can be prepared to see the fulfillment of God's promise - the establishment of new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Amen.