

Sixth Sunday of Easter
May 5, 2024
Year of the Most Holy Eucharist
Reflection #19

“Upon the rivers of Babylon, there we sat and wept: when we remembered Sion: On the willows in the midst thereof we hung up our instruments. For there they that led us into captivity required of us the words of songs. And they that carried us away, said: Sing ye to us a hymn of the songs of Sion. How shall we sing the song of the Lord in a strange land? If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand be forgotten. Let my tongue cleave to my jaws, if I do not remember thee: If I make not Jerusalem the beginning of my joy.” (Psalm 137:1-6)

Similar to last weekend, I again desire to press forward, roughly 500 years, to another moment in the religious life of the children of Israel. In approximately, 586 to 597 BC, the nation of Judah and its capital of Jerusalem fell victim to the expanding Babylonian Empire. This time frame would see the destruction of the Temple of Solomon and the city of Jerusalem left in ruins. Of the surviving population, civil and religious leaders, skilled craftsman and other notable individuals were deported to the Mesopotamian capital city of Babylon, commonly referred to as the Babylonian Exile. This time would see the beginning of a Diaspora, a moving away of Jewish inhabitants from the Promised Land into other cities in the known world. This one event has been considered the greatest traumatic event of the entire Old Testament. Yet, this event offers much for us to consider as we ponder our religious identity as it is tied to our belief in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist.

For the Jewish person alive in 600 BC, the Temple of God in Jerusalem was the highest expression of who they were as a people. The way they lived and believed, in essence, everything that made them who they are, was viewed through the prism of their being God’s chosen people. *“What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to him?”* (Deuteronomy 4:7). This person would have heard stories of an invading army heading in their direction. However, what need was there to worry or fret? God would defend His people. The mindset would consist in viewing the city and its inhabitants as invincible. They would have been reminded of how their ancestors were defended by God from the armies of Assyria who had camped outside the walls. Those Jewish citizens had watched that army retreat back to its own lands. Surely God would do the same again.

Now, place yourselves in their shoes. The city is taken; the Temple is profaned by the ungodly and the leading citizens and army are being taken away into exile. Everything this average Jewish person believed about God defending them, their being His chosen people, all of this is shattered as the city falls. The Temple is gone, the sacrifices have stopped; their prayers have fallen upon deaf ears leaving one to conclude – God has abandoned His people.

You may wonder what this event can offer to us as we continue our study of the Eucharist. May I offer this thought for your consideration: they were sorrowful because, without the Temple, their sacrifices could no longer be offered. Without the sacrifices, they could not offer praise to God, meaning, the door which had been opened allowing them access to His

Holiness and Grace was now closed. I now propose this question: If something similar occurred now, this church (St. Thomas or St. Bridget) was destroyed, then would that same door remain closed to us? Obviously, our answer would be No; but, why is it No? Put simply, it is the sacrifice, the Sacrifice of Jesus, which makes this building a special place for us to gather together to grow in His Holiness. The building is not what matters, it is what Jesus did, the offering of Himself upon the altar of the Cross, which makes this sacrifice and every sacrifice a means of holiness. The greatest expression of our Catholic identity is not based upon a church building nor the minister who presides within its walls. The greatest expression of our Catholic identity is found in a rather small piece of unleavened bread which, we believe and profess, contains within it the entirety of the Creator of All – the Body and Blood of His Divine Word, His Son, Jesus of Nazareth.