

Homily based on the readings from July 28, 2026 (Jeremiah 14.17-22;
Matthew 13.36-43)

It is fair to say that life does not always work out as we would hope or expect. All of us, if we have lived long enough, have had our share of sadnesses and disappointments: family members who have died too soon, terminal illnesses, financial difficulties, professional frustrations, marital discord. In some way or other, our lives have not unfolded according to the plans we would have laid out.

Looking around the world, we see the same type of desolation – but on an inconceivably vaster scale. Entire nations have had to endure pestilence, famine, drought, and even foreign invasion. In the United States, we can point to traumatic events such as the Great Depression, Pearl Harbor, and September 11th, but many other countries have had to deal with far worse. Across the globe, countless generations have been forced to witness their homelands being ransacked, despoiled, partitioned, and dismembered. In the aftermath of these horrors, many

huddled masses have sought refuge here in the United States – indeed, many of us here today are their descendants.

Today's first reading is a poignant account of suffering on a *national* level. Around the year 600 BC, the Kingdom of Judah – the successor to the mighty kingdom ruled over by David and Solomon – was completely vanquished by the Babylonian Empire. The capital city of Jerusalem, along with its majestic temple, was utterly destroyed. The surviving population was either left destitute or forced into exile. As we heard in today's first reading:

If I walk out into the field,
look! those slain by the sword;
If I enter the city,
look! those consumed by hunger.
Even the prophet and the priest
forage in a land they know not.

The problem here was not just that one particular nation was overcome by another. The problem was that God's chosen people – the people he had brought out of Egypt, the people he had sustained for forty years in the wilderness, the people upon whom he had bestowed the Promised Land – lost what they expected to possess for the remainder of human history. The Jewish people *knew* they had already received God's deliverance, yet somehow they still had to endure the agony of expulsion.

Nevertheless, in God's good time, this suffering came to a close. After seventy years, a new king – Cyrus the Persian – allowed the Jewish people to return to their homeland and ordered the reconstruction of the Temple. After a *lifetime* of agony, the Jewish people were finally able to reclaim the land of their forefathers.

The *point* of these events, which pertains to all of us – regardless of the era or the nation in which we live – is that salvation is rarely a straight-line path from the baptismal font to the Pearly Gates. There are always

setbacks and disappointments – even moments when we seem to be worse off than when we first started. Nevertheless – as long as we continue to trust in the Lord – our place in God’s kingdom is guaranteed in the end. Even though the earthly Jerusalem was conquered and the Temple destroyed, Jesus abides eternally in the *heavenly* Jerusalem – in which he himself is the Temple, in which he himself is the light. It is *that* hope – it is *that* promise – that sustains God’s weary pilgrims through our darkest days of exile.