

Our Old Testament reading today comes from the Book of Chronicles. And it provides a synopsis of a certain historical moment in the life of the Jewish people- the exile in Babylon.

What does Chronicles say? Well to start, the leading priests and the people were exceedingly unfaithful, they did not heed the word of the prophets sent to them by God. And so, they are punished. The Chaldeans, destroy Jerusalem and its temple and take the Israelites as captives; they become exiles in Babylon.

After seventy years, God raises up King Cyrus of Persia who defeats the Babylonians and permits the Jewish people to return to Israel.

So, the basic plot, sin, punishment for the sin, the intervention of God and then the restoration, the return of what was lost because of that sin.

The restoration comes about , according to the prophet Jeremiah after the land had made up for its Sabbaths. “All the days that it lay desolate it kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.”

What is the Sabbath? The seventh day of the week, the day of rest, the day it was forbidden to do any work. Sabbath means idleness, not doing anything, rest. According to Chronicles, as the land lay desolate it kept Sabbath. But if we enter more deeply into the notion of the Sabbath- the Sabbath was the special time that was carved out for God. The Sabbath day is the day dedicated to God-given to God. It was the time and space specifically set aside for the worship of God.

Chronicles implies that the infidelity, the abominations, the despising of the prophets had to be made up by the observance of a Sabbath- a lengthy sabbath. And may I infer that the Sabbath that is spoken of refers more to the laying idle, laying desolate, no work being done. In

this Sabbath time the people had to refocus; had to heed God's Word and enter into right worship once again.

In our Gospel today Jesus speaks about his being raised up. *"Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."*

Obviously, Jesus is here referring to his crucifixion, his death on the cross. Jesus is speaking of salvation. His death saves us. Our sins have led us into exile and through Jesus we are able to return home, what we have lost is restored.

But to truly grasp the nature of the restoration we have to come before the cross of Jesus in adoration, praise and worship. We seek salvation, we seek healing, we seek restoration at so many levels and it all comes through Jesus. But it requires a sabbath time, not a time of doing nothing, lying fallow and desolate (despite the outward appearances this pandemic time is not really a sabbath time) but a time truly carved out for God. A time of attentiveness, listening to his Word, of adoration and putting ourselves in right relationship with the Lord.