

OCTOBER 3 2025 FATHER MICHAEL COUTTS

The reading from Baruch starts off with, "God, you have put us into confusion and made our defeat, because we have sinned.

Right from the beginning, I want to state categorically: God does not punish us. The disasters and setbacks we have are the results of the choices that we make in our life.

A person who drinks too much cannot blame God for cirrhosis of the liver, or for death that ensues. If a person gambles all his money, his earnings and his savings, he cannot blame God for the fact that he is bankrupt, he is homeless, his marriage breaks up, and all these other disasters follow.

If a person gives in to licentiousness and promiscuity, God cannot--he cannot blame God for STDs and for sterility. We make our choices, and we pay for it.

But Baruch--in the time of Baruch, and even sometimes today, we believe that all the disasters that we have are because of the sins that we have committed. Now Baruch says quite frankly, we have broken the covenant that you made with us in the exodus.

What we have done is we have broken the Torah, we have not kept the sabbath, we have not kept the rite of circumcision, we have adored idols. And therefore, it is right and just that you should face us with confusion, with contempt, and with defeat.

And that is exactly what happened. The people of Israel, because they had done this, the enemies had come in, they had destroyed their synagogues, they had destroyed their sacred places, they had destroyed everything that they held dear. And they felt, well, we are justified, because we had made this covenant with the Lord.

It was the exodus experience that gave them not only their identity, but also a purpose in life. I found that a book written by a Canadian Sister of Sion, Maureena Fritz, who has been living in Jerusalem for almost 40 years now, explains that so beautifully. I read it, and I found that this scholarly work tells us how clearly the people of Israel realized how they were a chosen people, a royal nation, a people set apart, because of that covenant that God had made with them.

And because of that, they found that they had a whole sense of a new outlook on life. If I were to keep the Torah, if I were to make sure that the children were circumcised, if I were to keep the sabbath, and not adore idols, and mix up with the foreign nations around me, then God would protect me just like God protected the Israelites in the desert.

A fire or a column of fire during the night to lead them, a column of cloud during the day to lead them. And so, Baruch, and his--all the people he spoke to, rightly said, you know, we are cursed.

Which is ironic. Because the word Baruch means "blessed." And every Jew begins the morning prayer with: "Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha-olam." And it is these words that you and I use during our Mass. It simply means "Blessed are you Lord, God

Lord of the universe." And we use that during the Mass, when we offer the bread, and we offer the wine.

Our whole lifestyle today is based on this Jewish covenant that was made. But, it has been brought into the new covenant with Jesus Christ's coming.

So, what did the people of Israel believe in? What were their realities? Their reality was, you know, as long as we are faithful to the Lord, we will have three blessings.

One, we will have a blessing of wealth. God will be prosperous to us, our farms will be great. The second thing, we will have a blessing of health. We will not have sickness and disabilities. And the third blessing was victory over our enemies.

And now they fail in all three of them, because they have not kept up to the traditions that the Lord gave them. If you keep the traditions, you will be blessed.

But now, in the new covenant, when Jesus comes, as we hear in the Gospel, the prologue of John: "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God." God so loved the word that God sent this word into our midst, so that we may have life, and we may have light. Those who receive the word and receive Jesus Christ became children of God.

And so, instead of having this blessing, we have Jesus giving a curse. To Chorazin, to Bethsaida, to Capernaum... Because the word of God had come there, come in person, and they did not receive him.

He said to them, "The Spirit of the Lord has come down on me, to bring the good news of the poor." If you don't believe the words that I am saying, believe the deeds that I am doing. You see, the blind can see, the deaf can hear, the lame are leaping like lambs, and the captives have been set free.

So what did they do? Did they accept Jesus? Quite the contrary. When Pilate said to them, do you want me to release Barabas, or do you want me to release Jesus, the King of the Jews? And they all said Barabas. They chose a murderer. They chose a criminal, rather than an innocent man.

And the story has been repeating itself throughout the ages. In Germany we had Hitler, in Uganda we had Idi Amin, in Libya we had Muammar Gaddafi, in Iraq we had Saddam Hussein, in Cambodia we had Pol Pot... This is only to name those who have died.

I dare not name the people who are still alive, for the simple reasoning is God can still give them grace to change their hearts, as much as God gives you and me the grace to change our hearts and to turn away from sin, and be faithful to the Gospel

And that's exactly what Baruch tells us in our first reading. We have sinned, but we are going to change. We are going to be faithful to the Lord.

The reality, of course, is that we fall again and again. The beauty is that God does not depend--does not care how many times we fall, God only manages how many times we will rise again, and give glory to God.