



a Kendall Hunt Company

## Fourth Sunday of Lent, Year B, Catechist - RCLB Lectionary



### Catechist Background and Preparation

To prepare for this session, read all the readings.

2 Chronicles 36:14-16, 19-23

Psalm 137:1-2, 3, 4-5, 6

Ephesians 2:4-10

John 3:14-21

Spend a few minutes reflecting on what these readings mean for you today. Is there a particular reading that appeals to you? Is there a word or image that engages you?

Read the following **Word in Liturgy** and **Catholic Doctrine** sections. Read the Word in Liturgy and Catholic Doctrine sections. These give you background on what you will be doing this session. Read over the session outline and make it your own. Check to see what materials you will need.

### The Word In Liturgy

After taking possession of the land and establishing the monarchy, the people of Israel built a temple. Solomon's Temple housed the Ark of the Covenant and served as the center of national religious devotion until the time of the Exile, which took place when the Babylonian invasion destroyed the southern kingdom. When the Persians in turn destroyed Babylon, the Jews were freed to go home to Palestine and rebuild their temple. It is this episode—the return from exile—which closes today's first reading and the whole Hebrew Bible on a note of hope. Cyrus of Persia, a rare and outstanding Old Testament example of divine election outside of Israel, is seen as God's chosen instrument of restoration.

The author of First and Second Chronicles—a member of the priestly class—is concerned to present all of Israel's history in terms of the people's covenant relationship with God. The infidelities of the people are seen as the cause of divine punishment in Israel's national disasters, and the repeal of their misfortunes is due to divine mercy. In the unfolding of our Lenten readings, today's passage from 2 Chronicles is a reminder of the Davidic covenant and of the close association that developed between the settled land (along with its institutions of monarchy and temple) and the religious imagination of Israel. As Psalm 137 poignantly illustrates, exile from the land was a source of religious grief. To forget Jerusalem would be a profound act of disloyalty to God. Permission to return to the land and to rebuild the temple, therefore, must be viewed as a sign of grace and reconciliation.

In John's gospel, "the world" is seen as the special focus of God's care and concern. Yet, even

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so, it is clear that the world is in need of healing that only the Savior's death can provide. The gospel reading emphasizes the merciful kindness of God. Still, one must look upon the crucified Son with faith in order to receive the abundance promised. The coming of Jesus is the moment of judgment for the world because Jesus must either be believed or rejected. It is not God, but human beings who bring judgment upon themselves by choosing darkness rather than light.

The covenant can indeed be broken, and darkness chosen in preference to light (John). Indeed, we were all once "dead in sin" (Ephesians). Yet, in spite of this, God loves the world and does not seek to condemn it (John), new initiatives of rebuilding and restoration are possible (2 Chronicles), and grace is the basis of our new life in Christ.

## **Catholic Doctrine**

### **Grace**

What is grace? The very term in Latin (*gratia*) carries with it a wealth of meaning, such as "gift, favor, loving kindness, and the thanksgiving that accompanies a gift." Simply put, we believe that grace is God's gift to us. It is undeserved and freely given, enabling us to respond to God who calls us to be adopted sons and daughters. As such, we partake of God's own divine nature and eternal life. Grace is our participation, then, in the life of God. Through our baptism, we are incorporated into the mystery of Christ and put into relationship with God the Father, in union with the only Son. By grace we are gifted with the life of the Spirit who lavishes charity on us and forms the Church.

While all grace is a gift from God, Catholics distinguish between different types of grace. The grace we are given in baptism that sanctifies us, makes us holy, and heals us of sin is called sanctifying, or habitual, grace. It makes of us a new person, a new creation, and is a stable, supernatural disposition that enables us to become newly adopted sons and daughters of God. This sanctifying, or habitual, grace is distinguished from actual grace. This latter type of grace is how the Church describes God's help to us throughout our lives. In addition, there are also sacramental graces, gifts proper to the seven sacraments, special graces, or charisms that are manifested in unique and miraculous ways and graces of state given for ministry within the Church.

All of these different kinds of grace demonstrate the tremendous love of God for us. And yet this gift of God's love demands our free response. What has been freely given by God must also be freely accepted by us. We are to respond in freedom. While we are not forced into a stance toward God, at the same time God has planted within our very beings the desire and longing for truth and goodness that only the Most High can satisfy.