

Our first reading today takes us back almost 2600 years to the time when Jerusalem had suffered its first defeat at the hands of the Babylonians, and the first contingent of its leading citizens and religious leaders were taken into exile in Babylon. Among those taken was a young priest named Ezekiel, who had served the early years of his priesthood in the Temple of Jerusalem. The exile forced him to reflect as to why this disaster had fallen upon him and God's Chosen People, and drew him to recognise many of the ways in which all of them had failed to live up to the Covenant God had made with them.

It was while he thought about these things that he had the vision our first reading spoke about. He was called to use the insights he'd gained to call his people back to a true relationship with God, through their fidelity to God's commandments, and overcoming their inclinations to put their trust in their own assessments and preferences rather than in God's word.

It is a call that comes to all of us in one way or another. Each of us recognises situations and circumstances which are not right, are unjust and immoral, and we comment on them in our conversations and observations. Many of these situations may well be beyond our own ability to resolve, and demand a more united communal approach, but in all circumstances they demand that we examine ourselves to recognise where we ourselves may be at fault and to amend our ways. As one well-known Dutch saying has it: "If you want to change the world, begin with yourself."

For the Jewish people Ezekiel laid bare the roots of their infidelity and failures. In today's Gospel we heard Jesus do the same thing, - and it leads people to question: "Where did the man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been granted him, and these miracles that are worked through him?"

Unfortunately for them, they failed to look further than just asking the question, - they failed to recognise the only source from which this wisdom and this power could have come, and so they finish up with personal attacks and a slur on Jesus' ancestry.

Our invitation today is to look further, and like Ezekiel, to discern what ultimately lies at the root of society's ills today. The example of Jesus' ministry points to the lack of a rightly-directed and well-balanced spirituality.

There's a spiritual dimension to the lives of each one of us, whether that spirituality is good or evil, self-giving or self-driven, whether it benefits society, or takes from it what it can for self-gratification. In one way or another we pay homage to God or to the spirit of Satan.

Jesus, on the one hand, showed us through his life among us, how goodness, truth and mercy lead to a society or community where people reach out, care for and are concerned for each other, and how that society or community find strength in their faith and in their relationship with God, and through God with each other.

On the other hand he showed through the opposition he suffered from the Scribes and Pharisees, as well as from other religious and civil authorities, how power, wealth and status could be divisive in society, and lead to injustice, claims of privilege and abuse of power, which ultimately resulted in his own death on the cross, because what he stood for was a threat to their well-being as they saw it.

Which spirituality do we pay homage to, and which one do we ultimately want to prevail in our world today? That's the question Ezekiel asked: Did we want to be guided by God, or would we trust in our preferences and find ourselves in an exile of our own making?

One aspect of this is expressed in the theme of Naidoc Week, also mentioned last week: "Because of her, we can!"

It's the women in the aboriginal communities who, acting as prophets, have been leading their people and their communities out of the doldrums they've been caught in. They've become far more vocal about the need for proper housing, healthcare and education, the opportunity for rewarding work for their menfolk, recognition of their culture, respect for their dignity, and an end to the injustice that's been heaped upon their race since European settlement. Are we prepared to listen to them, stand alongside them, and recognise the words of Ezekiel in their endeavour, or blindly perpetuate the infidelity that led the Jews into exile?