

## **“Return to the Lord Who Has Redeemed You!”**

Isaiah 44:21-28

**Remember these things, O Jacob, and Israel, for you are my servant; I formed you; you are my servant; O Israel, you will not be forgotten by me. I have blotted out your transgressions like a cloud and your sins like mist; *return to me, for I have redeemed you.***

**Sing, O heavens, for the LORD has done it; shout, O depths of the earth; break forth into singing, O mountains, O forest, and every tree in it! For the LORD has redeemed Jacob and will be glorified in Israel. Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, who formed you from the womb: “I am the LORD, who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself, who frustrates the signs of liars and makes fools of diviners, who turns wise men back and makes their knowledge foolish, who confirms the word of his servant and fulfills the counsel of his messengers, who says of Jerusalem, “She shall be inhabited,” and of the cities of Judah, “They shall be built, and I will raise up their ruins”; who says to the deep, “Be dry; I will dry up your rivers”; who says of Cyrus, “He is my shepherd, and he shall fulfill all my purpose”; saying of Jerusalem, “She shall be built,” and of the temple, “Your foundation shall be laid.””**

Our theme for this Lent is “Return to the Lord”. And our particular theme for today is “Return to the Lord, who has redeemed you.” And for our meditation today we have these verses from the book of Isaiah, that we just heard.

Now, we all know that we have our limitations. Limitations of human creatures, more, of fallen and imperfect human creatures. We know that we are bound by time, and we are bound by space. The truth is that we exist only here and now.

We see and experience only our immediate situation. That’s where the spotlight of our attention is focused. That’s where our little worlds, our little lives revolve. And because of all these limitations, and because we are often so self-focused, by our very nature, we don’t know our God, and even we as Christians often struggle to see the wonder-inspiring greatness of our God.

But listen, for example, how Isaiah speaks about Him: “Lift up your eyes on high and see [the starry skies]: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name, by the greatness of his might.” (Isa 40:26)

And who are we comparing with our God? Who are the mighty of this world? Again in the words of Isaiah: “Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as the dust on the scales.” He “brings princes to nothing and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness.” (Isa 40:15, 23)

Our God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, He is the Lord over everything. All the nations, all the great and mighty, every turn of the history is in His hand. He is in control. Incomprehensible in His power and greatness, unstoppable accomplishing His plans.

And our today's reading provides one such an illustration of the greatness of our God. Besides, this is not just about the greatness and the power of our God, it is about His greatness and His power ... for us. For all His beloved family.

Do you know when Isaiah wrote down the words which we heard today? Around 700 BC. Let's see what is so unusual and encouraging about those words. Isaiah, or we should say the Holy Spirit speaking through Isaiah, was addressing these prophesies and words of comfort to his brothers and sisters Israelites far away in exile.

In Babylonian exile. He speaks to them these words of encouragement, on behalf of this God, who had created them, and had promised to never forget them. As He speaks through Isaiah, God Yahweh declares that He will send His shepherd, and that He will bring Israelites back from their exile to the promised land, and their beloved city Jerusalem and the temple of God will both be rebuilt again.

Some may wonder, and what is so special about these promises? Anything that seems unusual? Here it is. God Yahweh spoke this prophesy through Isaiah already two centuries before Jerusalem was destroyed and before Israelites were taken into Babylonian exile.

Isaiah wrote down this comforting message more than two and half centuries before they were actually brought back to Jerusalem and freed from their captivity. Do you see – through these words of prophesy God Yahweh had foretold the future of nations, and how He will guide it.

But then He also foretold, two and half centuries before it happened, who will be this promised shepherd who will bring God's people back to their land. And this is truly incredible! Probably you have heard about the Persian empire.

Probably you have heard also about Cyrus the Great, the most famous among Persian kings. Persian Empire, as it was created under the rule of Cyrus, was the world's first super-power. It stretched as far as including territories that we today know as Ukraine, India, Egypt and everything in between.

Two and half centuries before Cyrus was able to conquer these vast territories, the Holy Spirit spoke through Isaiah saying: "Cyrus in my shepherd, and he shall fulfill *my* purpose." God called him by name, who wasn't even born, the ruler of the empire, that didn't exist yet.

Remember the words ... "The nations are like a drop from a bucket" for our God. Our God is God of all creation. Our God is God of all history. He is God of all nations. The whole earth belongs to Him. No one can thwart His plans. He knows what He will do, and He can announce it centuries in advance.

We, on the other hand, we are so limited. We are even limited in our knowledge of God's message to us. We don't even know how much He has revealed to us. The Bible is a thick book, sure, and we are not always the keenest of students

either. Too often we prefer to open our eyes and ears to shallow entertainment rather than listening and meditating upon the words and works of our God. However, when our Lord speaks to us through His Word, when He reveals to us His loving and faithful heart, and when we actually listen, it is an amazing experience. Let's take our today's reading, how does it speak to us?

The same almighty and gracious God that through Isaiah spoke to Israel, who was able to foretell how He will guide the fate of nations and empires, the same God Almighty God still speaks to us today through the Scripture. Two and half millennia later, on the other side of the world.

And what He wants us to know hasn't changed that much. The same words written by Isaiah still speak to each one of us: **“Remember these things... I formed you ... you will not be forgotten by me. I have blotted out your transgressions like a cloud and your sins like mist; return to me, for I have redeemed you.”**

How good it is to hear God saying to you: **“Remember, I formed you, and I will never forget you.”** We are forgetful and we tend to forget the good that our Lord did to us yesterday, but He is not like us.

Our Father who is in heaven chose us, He chose you [!], in Christ before the foundation of the world, and He said that our names are written on the palms of His hands. He will never forget us. Of this we can be assured.

Then: “I have blotted out your sins like mist, return to me, for I have redeemed you.” “To redeem” means “to buy back something that was lost or buying someone out of slavery”. And here we can see how our God always acts first.

He never expects us to make the first step. Even before we were born, He prepared this planet to be our home. Before He revealed Himself to us, Jesus Christ had already redeemed us paying the highest price, that is – His life.

Our God doesn't demand “return to me and then I will redeem you.” There is no such a deal. There is no deal at all. Just divine grace and mercy. Abundant and overflowing. In His divine kindness and mercy our Father in heaven calls us and invites us: “Return to me, for I have already redeemed you! Return and receive everything that I have prepared for you from before the creation of the world!”

This is what our God is like. Your God, your Redeemer. We are so limited, but our God is not. We can love Him only in our limited way, He loves us unconditionally with the whole divine power of His Fatherly heart.

We struggle to be faithful, He is faithful, and He will never forget nor abandon us. We tend to wander astray. He is always, always calling us: “Return to me, for I have redeemed you, so that you may live with me in eternal blessedness.”

I pray today that we would never ignore God's call, and that by God's grace we would always hold fast to our God, who has redeemed us, for that is where we belong, that is where we are truly at home. Amen.