

Songs of the Exile (With Open Hands 1⁵)
 God of mercy, free your Church from sin and protect it from evil. Guide us, for we cannot be saved without you. We ask this through Christ O. Lord. Amen.

St Paul said that the word of God is a two-edged sword. Using the holy scriptures as proof or support for any particular point of view can be a very dangerous exercise, for you'll find your own position can be undermined by the word of God too. Whenever you're starting from, the gospel call is for conversion, turning to God — and if you think you're "arrived", that you know what God's will or His way is, well, think again. That is the message of many of the scripture readings chosen for use in the public worship of the Church during this cleansing season of Lent, a special time of conversion and of change. It's easy, perhaps, for us now to nod wisely in agreement when we read or hear some of the dramatic confrontations of Jesus with His listeners, when He overturns their conventional wisdom or assumptions about God. It's easy to read into some of those confrontations other names or people or times, or circumstances — you can even make some of them into quite telling political parables. But if you do, the joke or the punch-line can just as easily be you. The word of God is more subtle, more cutting, more powerful than our best intelligence or interpretation. And this is a time, in prayer and reflection, to open ourselves to that word, to be challenged by that word, now. We can perhaps easily see and identify the immediate challenge Jesus gave to His audience: the same challenge is also made to us now but there's another as well — what's being asked of us as we listen to the whole story including the reactions of Jesus' listeners? Are we so obviously on the side of the angels? With that in mind, listen again to the gospel reading for today, one of the more dramatic sections of St. Luke, in his 4th chapter: QQ. ^{MON} _{3 Lent}

"Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel" These are the words of gratitude and acknowledgement from the lips of the Syrian, Naaman, when Jesus referred to being healed of leprosy. His cure is a sign - pointer to the healing work of Jesus — God is not the exclusive claim of any nation, but rather the Lord of all peoples who heals those who turn to Him in faith & trust. We say that, and accept it, as if there was no difficulty — but do we really act that way? What about all the outcasts and outsiders we each create in our communities the refugees, criminals, the unemployed & unemployable? All of them are now people of God's promise, drawn into salvation together with us: it's God's choice, and must become ours. There is, however, a nice irony in the story of Naaman that Jesus referred to — Naaman too at first couldn't accept that there'd be a healing power outside of his own land and nation, and that apparently that power would be such a tiny, puny, unimpressive thing. His story is a challenge to any restrictive narrow view of what the choices and the calling of God means. Naaman's experience also suggests a reflection on baptism — and Lent is a baptismal time; again, God's choice, our commitment, are the faith, hope & love that reaches out to all the universe. With this in mind, then, let's listen to that great Old Testament story again — after this short break for a prayer and some music

In Presence of
People 27

"Walls of Salvation"

MUSIC

PRAYER

QQ. ^{MON} _{3 LENT}