

I am sure you are aware that there are many people in the world who don't know who their parents were, but at the same time would be very glad to find that out, so that they know their origins and identity much better. I have seen BBC documentaries about people who eventually did find their parents after years of research and when they met them first time ever in their lives they were elated, overwhelmed and sometimes even cried. What a fantastic thing to see.

Something similar is witnessed by the book of Nehemiah in the first reading. This book records the third return of the people of Israel to Jerusalem from exile and they are reunited with the God of Israel, their heavenly Father after a long time. However their separation from the Lord is the result of their turning away from the Lord. In exile their separation continues as they assimilate the religious customs of the pagan society in which they lived. So although they physically return to Jerusalem under the leadership of Nehemiah, they need to return spiritually as well under the leadership of Ezra, the high priest, and that spiritual renewal starts only when the Law of the Lord is read up to them. Remember what the first reading said: 'the people were all in tears as they listened to the words of the Law.' Why? Because it was a moment of repentance; in the light of the words of the Law they realised how much they have offended the Father and so they grieved for their sins.

Ezra reads up the Law, because he is desperate to bring the people of Israel back to the Lord not only physically, but spiritually as well, in their hearts, and as a result they regain their true identity as forgiven, though beloved sons and daughters of the heavenly Father.

We can forget about our true identity and go into a spiritual exile every time when we immerse ourselves into the cares of daily life and pick up a secular, unchristian mentality and way of reacting to people and judging people even in the Church. This is our inner exile, because we do not think and behave and live as children of the heavenly Father and brothers and sisters of each other. When we forget about our true identity as beloved human beings something else will creep in; something that is not from God, and that something is marked by materialism, occult practices, negativity, anger, short temperedness, etc. Others will try to tell us who we are; the secular media, which calls us animals, non-Christian film industry which encourages extramarital affairs, social media and those with invested interest on it will tell us who we are.

This is how we Christians and non-Christians can end up like captives, blind, downtrodden and spiritually impoverished, namely people like those to whom Jesus is sent, as we heard in the Gospel reading. But when we start listening to Him once again, and return to the most important Law of the Lord; to love God with all our hearts and minds and strength and our neighbour as ourselves, and do what Jesus tells us, as Mary says at the Wedding at Cana, then we will start to feel being different; because we will gradually regain our identity as baptised beloved sons and daughters of our heavenly Father, filled with the power of the Holy Spirit.

This is a new year, but let it be a year of renewal as well; a year of spiritual renewal; a year of the renewal of our relationship with the Father and with one another! There are many fathers and mothers among us who would love to see our sons and daughters coming back to church and worshipping God the Father. So renew your desire and efforts to bring them back to the Father, just like Ezra in the first reading did, either through prayers or by asking for the powerful intercession of our Lady or in whatever way you think appropriate.