

Our parish is honored today by the presence of Bro. Austin Maikowski, his community of the Christian Brothers, and his family and friends. Bro. Austin serves as a catechist in our religious education program and helps promote religious vocations. He began his career with the Christian Brothers in 1930; that's 67 years ago. Twenty-two of those years have been here in our diocese at De La Salle Academy, Christian Brothers High School, and Archbishop O'Hara High School. He's had a driver's license since he was sixty or so, and he received his masters' degree in 1987. Yes, he completed his degree when he was 75 years old. His joy is in service and his center is in God. He loves and respects students and prays that God will grant them the support they need.

What a contrast between the story of Bro. Austin and the story of the people of Israel in today's first reading. God made a covenant and set Israel free, but in their freedom, the people turned away from God. "All the leading priests and the people were exceedingly unfaithful." They worshiped false gods and they defiled the temple. God still loved Israel and sent prophets to steer them back, but the people mocked the prophets. So, enough is enough. God's wrath came down upon the people; the Chaldean army entered Jerusalem and burned the temple, its vessels, and the palaces of the rich. They murdered chosen people, and those who escaped death were taken into captivity until, the writer says, "the land had made up for its sabbaths." Until the land had made up for its sabbaths. You see, every seventh day the people were supposed to rest from work and let the land rest, but they didn't; so while Israel went into captivity, the land took the rest it had been denied. All the days that it lay desolate the land kept sabbath, to fulfill seventy years. What a difference between the life of a faithful child of God, and the sin of those who forsake God's law.

But there's also something the same, and that is God. When Cyrus became king of Persia, God moved him to free Israel and let them return to Jerusalem, where they rebuilt the temple and awaited the coming of their Messiah.

During lent each year we find ourselves somewhere on that spectrum, between those who follow God with all their hearts and those who have turned away from charity, truth, and service. Within a parish community we find examples all across the board. Lent proclaims two messages: one is that God loves us no matter how faithful or unfaithful we become. The other is to challenge us to move beyond our infidelity and to recommit ourselves to our faith. Let us thank God for the examples which light our way and enter this second half of lent using our freedom to turn away from sin and accept the love of God.

Bro. Austin lives a simple life and I'm sure he would prefer not to have all this attention today. But, Bro. Austin, our world is filled with covenants which stand broken and prophets who go ignored; the media make sport of our church and promote relationships built upon selfishness and pleasure. When we look at young people we pray that someone, somewhere would give them an example of fidelity to God, the happiness of service, and a love more fulfilling than they will find in popular songs or on the screens of our cinemas. When we consider our youth, Bro. Austin, we thank God for you, because in you our prayers are answered. Bro. Austin, we congratulate you on your 85th birthday this week, and thank God for your example, your service, and your life.

*kids homily on blindness; blindfold a kid, find someone wearing blue, walk down center aisle; when you're blind you make mistakes; (to kids) when are kids blind? (to parents) when are parents blind? (are priests blind?); what are things that make us blind? take off our blindfolds and we'll make fewer mistakes*