

## **Donnybrook**

7 December 2021

### **Welcome**

In our lives, there can be before and after events – events of such significance that we can easily distinguish before and after. At national level, good examples would be the Irish Famine or the French Revolution.

### **Topic**

For ancient Israel, the great exile in Babylon was such an event.

### **Steps**

The exile last from 587-539 bc. At first, the Israelites thought “we’ll be back home shortly. “But Jeremiah, ever cheerful, said, forget that, get married, have children, grow food, settle down, it is going to be a while. Once they settled down, the feeling set in that this would never, ever end leading to despondency and resignation. Precisely at that time our first reading was first proclaimed. The opening lines said it all: Comfort my people, comfort them. The poem goes on to give a marvellous description of a glorious return.

One little detail might escape attention. The flattening of the hills etc. was to make the return of God easier – a very subtle indication that God was with them all along in Exile, even when they were not aware of it.

### **Conclusion**

Our situation is not unlike that. You could be excused from feeling this pandemic is going to last for ever and we are condemned to a kind of “exile at home” from our normal lives. The message from Isaiah is no, the time of trouble is not permanent. We might find that hard to believe, as the Israelites did. But yes, the Exile did end, the ancient Israelites did return, with, as yesterday’s reading put it, everlasting joy on their faces.

May it be so! Amen.