

FR. JOHN'S HOMILY
Fourth Sunday of Lent, March 14, 2021

The Fourth Sunday of Lent is called Laetare Sunday. Laetare is a Latin word that means "rejoice." Even as we observe our Lenten sacrifices, we rejoice in anticipation of the joy that will be ours at Easter. This is our real reason to Rejoice! However outside of our Faith life- day to day activities, making a living, family life, school etc. - are we really rejoicing? Pandemic? Economy? Vaccines? Questions? Fears? I think we have to admit there is not much rejoicing going on at this time.

We must admit this Lent has been a different one, just like this past year. Lent means Springtime. So as we journey through Lent, hopefully springtime means more to us this year as we have hope that better days are ahead. We can only hope.

This Lent started off with Ash Wednesday in the midst of snow storm. A very small gathering at Mass, though many watched online in their homes. The First Sunday of Lent, we had the symbol of the desert during one of our coldest periods in our history. The desert again reminds us to strip ourselves of all that is not of God, to allow God to be our strength as we face our inner demons. The Second Sunday of Lent we heard about the mountaintop with Peter, James and John who witnessed the transfiguration of Jesus alongside with Moses and Elijah, Jesus being the fulfillment of the Law and the prophets. The words of the Father saying, 'Listen to Him'. This is our calling - to always listening to Jesus. Then Jesus heads down the valley towards Jerusalem. In the Third Sunday of Lent, as Jesus goes into Jerusalem into the Temple to pray, he finds it has become a market place. He gets a whip and He cleans out the temple. As we invite Jesus into our lives, He too will cleanse out everything from our hearts and minds, so that we can live our true calling as Temples of the Holy Spirit.

And now in the Fourth Sunday of Lent, the half way point, we come to Laetare Sunday, Rejoice Sunday. We find ourselves rejoicing with our focus on contradiction, a paradox; our reason to Rejoice - The Cross. Yes, our focus and attention brings us to the greatest act of love - Jesus on the Cross. Always our reason to Rejoice.

The cross — especially the crucifix, with a corpus of Christ — recalls the Crucifixion of Jesus and the redeeming benefits of his Passion and death.

St. Bonaventure said, "He who desires to go on advancing from virtue to virtue, from grace to grace, should meditate continually on the Passion of Jesus".

St. Thomas Aquinas considered the events and implication of Holy Week, in particular Good Friday, so vital to faith that he addressed it at great length: "The

cross exemplifies every virtue.” Aquinas once said. “If you seek the example of love: ‘Greater love than this no man has, than to lay down his life for his friends.’ Such a man was Christ on the cross.”

This Fourth Sunday of Lent we look to the Cross as the cause of our Rejoicing. We rejoice because the Lord continues to call us His people and to draw us to Himself. We rejoice because we know that Jesus came in the flesh for us, died for us and is raised from the dead for us.

The First Reading which is from the Second Book of Chronicles takes up the history of the monarchs - the Kings. 2 Chronicles begins with Solomon’s reign who is second only to David. Solomon under his reign built the Temple. It stresses the importance of the temple and worship. Even with this, it also chronicles the sad history that God’s people were unfaithful and finally taken from their own land into exile in Babylonia. It tells of the story of the fall of Judah. However the cause of rejoicing is that the King of Persia, Cyrus, allows the Jews to return and rebuild the Temple. In one of the saddest moments in their history there is cause for rejoicing.

Today’s Gospel Reading, taken from John’s Gospel, gets us to look up to Jesus and to look up at the Cross. The looking up are words Jesus gives to Nicodemus, a leading Pharisee, that had been questioning Him. Jesus referred to an incident reported in the Old Testament. When the Israelites grumbled against the Lord during their sojourn in the desert, God sent venomous serpents to punish them for their complaints. The Israelites repented and asked Moses to pray for them. The Lord heard Moses’ prayer and instructed him to make a bronze serpent and mount it on a pole. All who had been bitten by a serpent and then looked upon the bronze serpent were cured. As Jesus recalls this story, He is now pointing to what will happen on Calvary. Jesus alludes to the salvation that would be accomplished through His Death and Resurrection.

Jesus says just as Moses lifted up the serpent and all who looked upon it were healed: so too the Son of Man will be lifted up so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.

John 3:16 - *For God so loved the world that He gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.*

Jesus is asking us to remember His great act of sacrificial love, the heart of our Good News, the reason for Rejoicing whatever time we may find ourselves in. Because no matter how sad or difficult the time is, we look to the cross, we look to Jesus and remind ourselves that God so loved the world, He gave us His only Son. Rejoice in the Lord always, again, I say Rejoice.