

Lent 4 year b

Today the 4th Sunday in Lent is called Laetare Sunday.

Laetare means Rejoice and today we do rejoice because we look forward to the end of the Lenten season and all that we have gained from it, as we look forward to the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The central theme of today's readings is that our salvation is a free gift from a merciful God given to us through Jesus His Son.

The readings stress Gods mercy and compassion, the great love, kindness and grace extended to us in Christ.

Through faith and in gratitude and love of God, we are encouraged to share Jesus sufferings through our own acts of penance during Lent.

In this 4th week of Lent, through our continued acts of penance and prayer may we enter more deeply into the mystery of Gods grace, mercy and salvation.

John today talks of the light that came into the world but the people preferred darkness. The chronicler in the 1st reading today says something similar.

“They mocked the messengers of God, despised his warnings and scoffed at His prophet”

This reading comes from the historical events surrounding the Jewish exile in Babylon. The message is that due to the people’s infidelities they lost their temple and their homeland. However a merciful God used Cyrus the Great, a pagan, to bring his people back out of exile, returning them to their homeland and helped them to rebuild the temple...

In the second reading Paul tells us that God is so rich in mercy that He has granted us eternal salvation through the suffering and death of Jesus his Son.

Paul reminds us that we can achieve nothing, spiritually, on our own but only through the undeserved grace of God.

The Gospel starts with John referring to the Jewish experience in the desert when they complained, regretting that they had left the reliability of life in Egypt for the

privations of the wilderness. Their punishment was a plague of deadly serpents. When the people repented and cried for mercy God instructed Moses to make an image of a serpent and those who looked on it were saved.

Jesus tells Nicodemus that, just like the bronze serpent in the Moses account, he too must be lifted up and this act would bring about salvation.

John in his Gospel referred to Jesus being lifted up three times.

On the cross Jesus bore the sins of the world. We too find eternal life through our belief in the cross and all it represents. Just as the cross was the way to glory for Jesus, so it will be for us.

John's statement that "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" is perhaps the best loved verse in the Bible, it is a summary of the Gospel message of salvation through Jesus Christ

St Augustine said "God loves each one of us as if there were only one of us to love" God's motive is love and his

objective is salvation for all and we come to salvation through our belief in the Son.

When we walk according to the teachings of Christ we are walking in light. If we ignore these teachings we are in effect opposing Christ himself, hence we are walking in darkness. Darkness is symbolic of all those acts that deprive us of life, substance addictions, gambling, sexual abuses, environmental irresponsibility. These things and many more are the dark corners of life.

Our lives matter to God and he knows all about the dark corners in our lives, he wants us to come out into the light so that he can brighten up every corner through his forgiveness of sin. He urgently awaits us coming back to him through reconciliation.

The symbol of God's merciful love and compassion is Jesus lifted up on the cross, inviting us also to share love and compassion with those in need, especially in this season of Lent.

Let us make what's left of our time in lent, to share the light with others as Matthew said in 5:14

“You are the light of the world...your light must shine before people so that they will see the good things you do and praise your Father in Heaven”.

Jesus spoke to St Francis of Assisi from the cross in the church of St Damiano in Assisi which led him to embark on his fantastic journey in following Jesus.

We have in the church an image of Christ crucified which is copied from the cross from which Jesus spoke to St Francis.

So during mass today let us keep our gaze firmly fixed on this image of Christ and contemplate all that it means for us.