

Reflection for the 4th Sunday of Lent

Today as a faith filled people, we celebrate the Fourth Sunday of Lent, which is traditionally seen as the half-way point in our Lenten Journey. The Fourth Sunday of Lent is rather unique; like the Third Sunday of Advent, the Fourth Sunday of Lent is a break in a season of preparation. The traditional color of the vestments that the priests and deacons, wear on this Sunday is rose as they are on the Third Sunday of Advent. The purple vestments that are worn for the rest of the Seasons of Advent and Lent can also be worn of the Third Sunday of Advent and the Fourth Sunday of Lent. On both of these Sundays it is acceptable for flowers to adorn the Altar.

The Fourth Sunday of Lent is traditionally call *Laetare Sunday* it is also referred to as *Rose Sunday*, for the color of vestments that are traditionally worn. The reason why the Fourth Sunday of Lent is call *Laetare Sunday*, is because of the Entrance Antiphon for this Sunday:

Laetare Jerusalem: et conventum facite omnes qui diligitis eam; gaudete cum laetitia, qui in tristitia fuistis: ut exsultetis, et satiemini ab uberibus consolationis vestrae.

Rejoice, Jerusalem, and all who love her. Be joyful, all who were in mourning: exult and be satisfied at her consoling breast.

This Entrance Antiphon is taken from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, chapter 66, verses 10 thru 11, and it reminds us of the blessings of prosperity and consolation which are a part of our relationship with God.

Laetare Sunday is a break or rest-stop in the penitential season of Lent. It provides us an opportunity to be reminded that by embracing our faith in Jesus Christ, we have embraced a faith that is filled with joy and love. This is a faith that compels us to rejoice. The season of Lent is a time of prayer, fast, and abstinence, but we are a people who have been saved by the loving act of Jesus giving His life for our salvation. This loving act of our Savior compels us to rejoice and be glad.

The message of the Prophet Isaiah found in the Entrance Antiphon is fitting for this Sunday and for our journey of faith in or out of the season of Lent. For we should always rejoice knowing that God the Father of the universe has sent His only Son into the world for our salvation. The act of our heavenly Father is one of pure love and it is love that transforms the world and our lives. With this knowledge we should be a people that are always rejoicing no matter what Season of the Liturgical year we are in. May we also be able to rejoice even in times of struggle and times of loss, for our God is a loving God, who provides us with blessings of prosperity and consolation.

It is fitting that on this *Laetare Sunday*, the half-way point in our Lenten journey, our Gospel reading is the Parable of the Prodigal Son. For in this parable that Jesus addresses to the Pharisees due to their complaint that he was welcoming sinners and eating with them, Jesus provides a message for everyone not just the Pharisees. The Parable of the Prodigal Son provides all who hear and read this parable with an opportunity to reflect on our need to seek forgiveness as well as our need to be forgiving. The Parable presents a loving Father who is understanding and forgiving and is willing to allow his younger son to take his inheritance and leave the family, squandering his inheritance on a life that brings no true happiness and peace. The father is content with waiting for his son to recognize his mistakes and to be ready to return to the family. Once the younger son returns to the family asking for forgiveness the father is willing to forgive him and welcome him back home. The older brother who had been faithful to the family and had not wondered far from home struggles with accepting his brother. This parable has no explanation and needs no explanation, for us to understand the message it presents.

Our parable today, along with the parables of the *Lost Sheep* and the *Lost Coin* also found in in chapter 15 of the Gospel of Luke, respond to a concern that the Pharisees have at the start of the chapter, which is that Jesus welcomes sinners and eats with them. These three parables individually and as a group respond to the concern that the Pharisees share. Jesus came into the world for the lost and forgotten of the world. Our Savior gave His life for us not because we earned His love and forgiveness, but that we needed his love and forgiveness. All three parables in chapter 15 of the Gospel of Luke are about finding the lost and rejoicing in them coming home. But the parable of the *Prodigal Son*, also informs us that our God is a patient Lord that will wait for us to be ready to come home. Our parable this Sunday also reminds us of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and the opportunity it provides all of us to repent and return to the home of our father.