

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 on the Third Sunday of Advent and the Fourth Sunday of Lent. On both Sundays it is acceptable for flowers to adorn the Altar.

The Fourth Sunday of Lent is traditionally called *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 called *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 uberbus consolationis vestrae.

Rejoice, Jerusalem, and all who love her. Be joyful, all who were in mourning; exult and be satisfied.

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 with 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.

At the end of our Gospel Reading this Sunday we hear the father saying to his son, “*But now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found, Luke 15:32.*” This is of course the parable of the Prodigal Son, and the message of this parable truly does fit with the message of *Laetare Sunday*, the father saw good reason to rejoice for his son who was thought to be dead was alive, his son who was lost was found. Of course, the rejoicing only came about because the son saw the errors of his ways and returned to the father and family with a contrite heart. We hear earlier in the parable when the son was returning to father, he has the intention to say, “*Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son: treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers, Luke 15:18-19.*” The father saw his son from a long way off and ran to embrace him. It would appear that the father had been looking for his son ever since he had left but he dared not to hope that his son would return and assumed his son was lost to him forever.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son should be seen as informing and reminding us of the great gift that we have in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This Sacrament in our Church provides us with an opportunity to repent and return to our Lord. To embrace the example of the Prodigal Son and return to the fold. This parable also informs us how we should respond when others repent and return to the fold. May we be like the Prodigal Father and embrace with rejoicing those who return, and not like the Prodigal Brother who is not accepting of his brother who returns to the fold. *Laetare Sunday* provides us with a respite in this Season of Lent to rejoice and be glad, for our Lord is kind and forgiving. It can be easy for us to become so focused on this Season of prayer, fast, and abstinence that we forget the joy we should have knowing that we have a kind and forgiving God. The Parable of the Prodigal Son and *Laetare Sunday* reminds us of the type of God we are blessed to have, so may we rejoice, but may we also strive to be as kind and forgiving to each other as our God is to us.