

#### **4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent 3-14-2021**

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ Jesus. Today the Church celebrates Laetare Sunday as we celebrated Gaudete Sunday in the season of Advent. It is a kind of invitation to rejoice with the hope of expecting good things to happen, that is, the Easter. In Advent, the third Sunday is celebrated as Gaudete Sunday with joy and rejoicing for the birth of Jesus. Now the fourth week we celebrate Laetare Sunday, rejoicing in hope of Easter. So this joy of Easter. And today again, through the Gospel, we are invited to have this joy in our life because of the love of God. And the Gospel says, "God so loved the world that he gave his only son." Yes my dear sisters and brothers, right from the beginning of the human creation, God so loved the world, and that is how he created the first parents, Adam and Eve, in his own image and instilled his own breath into the first human persons, and he was with them in the Garden of Eden. All through the life of Adam and Eve, he was accompanying them, though he was invisible to them, but still he was trying to follow them, accompany them, so that they may not get lost in their life. But because of their disobedience, because of their selfishness, they went away from God's love. But still God kept loving humanity. Even after the Israeli people were in the land of Egypt, in slavery, he had such compassion, that love for those people, that he sends his own servant, Moses, and redeems them; makes them to go to the Promised Land, telling them that he has made a covenant with them so that he can be their God, and they can be his own people. Such was the covenant that God made with them. But what happened was that in the process of their journey they broke the covenant and went away from God's love and worshiped the other gods. The punishment and the wrath of God was upon them. That's when he sends the serpents that bite everyone and many of them were killed. Did God leave at that? No, he still goes with his love behind the people of God, and tells Moses to lift up a bronze serpent, so that those who were bitten can be saved and they can come in life. Yes, my dear sisters and brothers, with that, the love of God did not come to an end. Still, though, people have gone astray from God's love, God loved them till the end – he says I will send my only son to them and I will deliver them. I would give them redemption from their sins, from the disobedience. And we have heard the same Gospel, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only son." Now reflecting on this love of God, we also need to reflect on worldly love. Sometimes, the word "love" is being used in different ways. A person who loves the other tells, "I love you, honey," or "I love you, darling." So, we like to express that. Perhaps not enough of us do that, right? But then, how genuine are we? How truthful are we in telling "I love you so much"? Do we really say that? So when we say that, we need to analyze some kinds of loves.

In Greek, we come across four kinds of love. The first one is "Eros." Eros means this love between spouses, husbands and wives. It can be sensual love, also. Of course that is very much part of the married life and God again permits that too. In this love, the husband loves the wife and wife loves the husband; of course that is very much part of the married life. But how many of us would definitely say that I truly love - in spite of his weaknesses; in spite of her weaknesses? And again, there are also people that have a conditional love, right? If the husband is giving lots of gifts to the wife, buying her a car and many more things, the wife

definitely tries to love the husband more, and vice versa. The wife is very much obedient to the husband and then, okay, the husband is very much loving toward the wife. So there is always a kind of give-and-take policy; there is nothing unconditional. If you love me then I will love you. If you give something, definitely my love increases more. And another kind of love is "Storge." Storge is between the whole family: between the parents loving the children and the children loving the parents. So it is altogether the familial love. What happens in the familial love is that the children love the parents much when the parents love the children. Of course there are many wants and needs for the children. When the children ask the parents and the parents give, they say, "Oh my parents are the best ones in the world and I love them most;" and if they deny something, "Oh, I don't like, because what I ask, my parents don't give me." So there is again, a condition - only if they give, will I love. The parents also do the same.

And the third kind of love is "Philos." That love comes between friends. For example, college friends who go around together, go to dinner parties and whatnot. All this happens, but if at one point there is a misunderstanding, if there is a conflict, if there is a fight, then they just break up. In this kind of love there is an ulterior motive - only if that person loves me, will I keep on loving.

But there is a fourth kind of love which is beyond all this. That is "Agape." Agape is loving the other without any limit, without any condition, without any reservations. In Sanskrit, it is called Nishkamakarma - "I love you even if you don't love me. I forgive you, even if you do not forgive me. I show you compassion, even if you are not good to me." So that is called the agape love that we are meditating on here in the Gospel today. God so loved the world that he gave his only son. He came into this world not for his own glory, not to gain people's appreciation, but he came precisely for giving his life for the sake of the people, for the salvation of the people. And at the end Jesus hangs on the cross, just saying "I love you so much." When Jesus was on the cross a child went to the foot of the cross and said, "Jesus, how much do you love me?" Jesus, looking down to the child, says, "My child, I love you so much." Then he extends his hands and he dies. Normally speaking, we cannot extend our hands more than this, even if we try, we cannot. So that is the extension of God's love for all humanity. Each of us, after analyzing and reflecting this love of God - what comes to our life?" Sometimes I wonder if you have seen the movie called "The Passion of the Christ." Even if you haven't seen it you will shed tears, because such is the pain, such is the cruelty that Jesus underwent, experiencing everything, not for himself but for us. My dear sisters and brothers, that pain, the sufferings and all the struggles that Jesus underwent for the love of humanity should instill in our hearts just how much we love him.

It happened that one old lady went to a missionary priest and asked for a Bible. The priest gave a Bible to the old lady, but the old lady preferred a French Bible. And then she asked the priest to mark this particular verse - "That God so loved the world that he gave his only son into this world." She asked him to mark it with a red marker. And so this priest marked it with a red marker and gave the Bible back to her. So taking this Bible she went to a school nearby. And the

priest had some doubt, how will she do this? She is a blind lady, illiterate; what is she going to do with this Bible - and asking me to mark with a red marker this particular verse. The priest followed her, she entered into a school, calling out to a little boy, she asked, "My dear boy, can you find the particular verse, in John?" And then the boy also helped her to read that verse. Then the boy read, "That God so loved the world" and all that follows. Then she asked, "Can you explain this one verse for me?" The boy was a bit reluctant because he did not know much about the Bible and he didn't want to have to explain it. The lady went on explaining, this is how God loved us, that he came down from Heaven and he died for us and that is how we are saved. Today, we need to be grateful for his love. She went on with so many kids in the school, telling and explaining the works of God, that God so loved us. In the end and she was able to collect at least 10 missionaries for the priesthood. Yes, my dear sisters and brothers, if we experience that love of God in our life, we need to be the messengers of God's love. Not necessarily that we need to go to the other places, street corners, and proclaim. I had an experience when I was an associate pastor in particular church, I heard a person early in the morning talking about the Bible, saying, "Believe in the Gospel." He used to shout and go to the street corners and after a few days he was no longer there. We thought that he was killed by non-Catholics, likely because of his faith. I used to hear the question, "What is faith meant to be, what is the proclamation of the Gospel?" I think that it is too extreme and I am not telling you that we should go to the street corners and preach the Gospel, but then we can preach the Gospel, we can tell the love of God, how much God loves us - through our own lives. When we love the other, when we show compassion towards the other, when we forgive the other without any condition; that is how we can also show that God loves us so much. And in return, we love another in society and in the world.

Today, my dear sisters and brothers, the season of Lent calls us to be introspective. Whether we experience, first and foremost, this love of God, who, day in and day out, comes in search of us, telling us that, "I love you, I love you to the extent of giving my life to you." Do we love him back- in loving one another wherever we are - in our own families, loving our children, children loving their parents, spouses loving each other and not having any condition coming between them? And that's how, my dear sisters and brothers, we can tell God, "Lord, I love you so much" - by loving our fellow brothers. Let us ask the good Lord to give us the courage to say that we love our fellow brother without any condition. Amen