



Homily for 3/22/2020

Fourth Sunday of Lent (Laetare), Ancient Form

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Rejoice in Hope

This Sunday we celebrate the Fourth Sunday in Lent, also known as Laetare Sunday. Laetare is the Latin word for Rejoice! And it comes from the introit of today's Mass, "*Laetare, Jerusalem: et conventum facite, omnes qui diligitis eam*". "Rejoice Jerusalem, and come together, all you who love her: rejoice with joy, you who have been in sorrow; that you may exult, and be filled with consolation"

Now these are very strange words for us as we approach the Holy Sacrifice in the midst of the Coronavirus Pandemic. This outbreak has us quarantined and practicing the recommended social distancing to protect the common good and especially those most vulnerable to the effects of the disease. How can we rejoice when the public celebration of Mass has been prudently cancelled? How can we come together if we are confined to our homes and only very small gatherings? Instead of being those who have been in sorrow in the past, we are those who are in sorrow right now. How can we relate to the command to rejoice? The answer lies in our faith. We believe in God Almighty who is the Creator of all things – He is the Lord and Master of all things in heaven and on earth, from the smallest microbe to even time itself. At the same time, we believe in an all-loving God who loves humanity even to the point of dying for us. We also believe that given his knowledge and command of all things and his most profound love for us, whatever He permits fits into a plan of providence that will result in our ultimate good, even if it unfolds in mystery. This is the act of faith that we make. I believe. And it is our trust in His almighty providence coupled with the proofs of His constant, even if mysterious love for us, throughout Salvation History that, yes, even today, in these present dire circumstances we as a Christian People can still rejoice.

This act of faith is what we do every time we enter the Sacred Mysteries of our Faith. Just one example is that even as I approached the altar today, Mother Church in Her Liturgy bid me to pray in Psalm 42 (43):

Why are you downcast, my soul?
Why do you groan within me?
Wait for God, for I shall again praise him,
my savior and my God.

Now the Scriptures are proclaimed at Mass to remind us of these moments of Divine Providence and to inspire in us this same Act of Faith in this moment of our lives. In the Gospel we hear about the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand with five barely loaves and two fish. Notice how this miracle leads to the people's belief that Jesus is the prophesied promised one. They would have recalled the story of the great prophet Elijah who fed the widow of Zarephath and her son for a year on a handful of flour in her jar and a little oil in her jug. "The jar of flour did not go empty, nor the jug of oil run dry, according to the word of the LORD spoken through Elijah." (1 Kg 17:12-16) When Elijah died, a double portion of his spirit came down upon his disciple Elisha who also worked a miracle of providence. When there was a famine in the land of Gilgal a man came bringing twenty barley loaves Elisha said, "Give it to the people to eat." But his servant objected, "How can I set this before a hundred?" Elisha again said, "Give it to the people to eat, for thus says the LORD: You will eat and have some left over." He set it before them, and when they had eaten, they had some left over, according to the word of the LORD." (2 Kg 4:42-44) Elisha fed one hundred people with twenty barley loaves. No wonder the people marveled at Jesus, because now here was one who fed five thousand with five barley loaves and two fishes and after everyone had their fill, twelve baskets full of fragments were left over. Truly there is someone greater here than both Elijah and Elisha.

But there is even something greater than that miracle worked on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus worked that miracle to prepare the hearts of His disciples for the greater miracle he would work by giving Himself as the Bread of Life. God has seen fit to provide His children with a source of life that will never run dry and which will satisfy



every longing of our hearts. The miracle is the one worked at the Last Supper, completed on Calvary Hill at the Crucifixion and represented to us every time we offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass following the Lord's command to "Do this in Memory of Me!"

During this time when the Holy Sacrifice is taking place behind closed doors we may wonder how we are to have access to this wonderful mystery. The word I would say to you is this: The God who can feed five thousand from five loaves is capable of feeding your soul even now in your homes with His Grace from on high. The normal way is of course through Holy Communion. "Take this all of you and eat of it", our savior says. But in these circumstances, we do not know how long the famine that deprives us of the bread of life will last. But there is still cause for hope and rejoicing. The reality is that even one act of Communion is sufficient to bring this saving reality into our being. Each of us can call to mind our first Communion our last Communion and all the Communions we have made with our Lord throughout life. In this sacred remembering we can call upon the infinite Graces bestowed upon our souls in each of these events as a source of hope and rejoicing. I call upon each and every one of you attending this Mass in Spirit and in Truth to make a Spiritual Communion with our Eucharistic Lord. I invite you in this moment to make that Spiritual Communion with me:

My Jesus,
I believe that You
are present in the Most Holy Sacrament.
I love You above all things,
and I desire to receive You into my soul.
Since I cannot at this moment
receive You sacramentally,
come at least spiritually into my heart. I embrace You as if You were already there and unite myself wholly to You.
Never permit me to be separated from You.

Amen.

Now is the time for hope and hope is the cause of our rejoicing. God will provide for His Children and there will be a day when we can come together, rejoice with joy and be filled with His consolation.

May Jesus Christ be Praised!