

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

2 Chr 36:14,19-23

Ps 137:1-6

Eph 2:4-10

In 3:14-21

The Fourth Sunday of Lent is called *Lætare* (Rejoice) Sunday, from the first words of the day's liturgy [the Introit]. Since this Sunday occurs in the middle of Lent, as *Gaudete* Sunday is celebrated midway through Advent, *Lætare* Sunday reminds us of the Event to which we look forward at the end of the penitential season. As on *Gaudete* Sunday, rose-colored vestments may replace violet, and flowers may grace the altar. In Lent, these outward signs symbolize the Church's joy in anticipation of the Resurrection, a joy which cannot be contained even in this penitential Season, though we still refrain from Alleluias and the singing of the Gloria until the magnificence of the Easter Vigil.

The central theme of today's readings is that our salvation is the free gift of a merciful God, given to us through Jesus, His, Son. The readings stress God's mercy and compassion and remind us of the great love, kindness, and grace extended to us in Christ. As an act of love and gratitude to God Who is "rich in mercy," and as an expression of our Faith, we are invited to share Jesus' sufferings by doing penance during Lent so that we may inherit our eternal salvation and the glory of his Resurrection in Heaven. As we continue our Lenten observance for the fourth week, the Sacred Liturgy invites us to enter more deeply into the mystery of God's grace, mercy, and salvation. In the first reading, taken from the Second Book of Chronicles, we learn the compassion and patience of God. God chose Cyrus the Great, a pagan conqueror, to become the instrument of His mercy and salvation for His chosen people exiled in Babylon. Today's Responsorial Psalm (Ps 137) presents the sad picture of weeping Jewish exiles in Babylon, refusing to sing the joyful songs of Judah because —through their own infidelity — they have been exiled to a pagan Kingdom, and everything they have held dear has been taken from them. In the second reading, Paul tells us that God is so rich in mercy that He has granted us eternal salvation and eternal life as a free gift through Christ Jesus. Today's Gospel has a theme, parallel to the first reading but on a much higher level. Jesus, the Son of God, has become the agent of God's salvation, not just for one sinful nation but for the sinfulness of the whole world. Through John 3:16, the Gospel teaches us that God has expressed His love, mercy, and compassion for us all by giving His only-begotten Son for our salvation.

We need to love the cross, the symbol of God's forgiving and merciful love: The crucifix – the symbol of the “lifted up” Jesus – holds a central place in our Churches because it is a forceful reminder not only of God's love and mercy but also of the price of our salvation. Hence, no Christian home should be without this symbol of God's love. The crucifix invites us to respond with more than compassion; it inspires us to remove the suffering of other people's misery. It encourages us not only to feel deep sorrow for another's suffering but also to try our best to remove that suffering. Hence, let us love the cross, wear it, and carry our own daily cross with joy.

We need to reciprocate God's love by loving others. God's love is unconditional, universal, forgiving, and merciful. Let us try, with His help, to make an earnest attempt to include these qualities as we share our love with others during Lent, for in them we love and serve Him.

Our rebirth by water and the Spirit must be an ongoing process. As Christians, we are meant to lead a life of repentance and ongoing conversion, bringing us to a renewal of life with the help of the Holy Spirit living within us. The renewal of the Spirit comes when we work with Him to be liberated from the bondage of evil habits by using the Divine strength we receive from Him through prayer, Adoration, Bible reading, and frequenting the Sacraments of Reconciliation and the Holy Eucharist.

Let us be bearers of Jesus' Light and carry it to other people. When we allow the Light of God's forgiveness to shine in our lives, it brightens up every corner, forgives every sin, restores our relationship with God, and renews our lives. Whoever follows Jesus will not walk in darkness. We will experience the joy and peace of sins forgiven, of new attitudes, and of new relationships with God, family, and friends. Jesus' Light of truth, justice, holiness, and charity shining in our lives is meant to bring blessing to others. We are to let this Light of Christ shine through us into the lives of the people around us. The Light we give to others can dispel the darkness of their lives (as well as to our own in the sharing) and bring them to a completely new outlook. Let us not underestimate what the Light of Christ can do through us. As Jesus said: “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” (Mt. 5:14, 16).