

Our Lenten Journey IV



El Greco

## **Why is this Sunday called “Laetare Sunday?”**

This Sunday is so called by the opening word of the mass (Entrance Antiphon): **Rejoice – Laetare**. The Church interrupts the solemnity of her Lent. Flowers are permitted, the organ can play more fully and Rose vestments can be worn – this is similar to the third Sunday of Advent “Gaudete.” Why? Mother Church wants to encourage us, Lent is more than half-way over and the great joy of the Resurrection will soon be upon us. So we must persevere and today allow ourselves a tasting of the great joy to come when our labours are over and Christ is risen.

## **How is the solemnity of the Sunday, one of the most solemn of the year, marked in Rome?**

Firstly, the station mass – each day in Lent the Pope would celebrate mass at a particular church - is held at the basilica of the “Holy Cross in Jerusalem.” This contained the inscription placed on the cross as well as other instruments of the passion. What is the significance of this? It points us to the heavenly Jerusalem, which is our real homeland. We have to follow Christ in his passion to arrive at the heavenly temple where we shall have unending bliss. Secondly, the Pope blesses a golden rose and can anoint it with Chrism, which is then bestowed on a deserving person or place. In recent times, the popes have granted it to a particular place of devotion. The significance of this is that the colour, fragrance and beauty of the rose make us think of the spiritual joy that should be ours on this Sunday – indeed throughout our lives.

## **What is the main theme of today’s mass?**

To recap briefly, we started on the First Sunday with the theme of Lent – the 40 days of Jesus in the desert and his temptation; this was followed by the Church showing us the goal of our efforts: our transfiguration in Christ. Last Sunday (IIIrd) the Church put before us the important symbol of water in our journey in the desert and that Christ comes to pour out the Holy Spirit – the living water – upon us; so during Lent we must avail ourselves of the sacraments. Today, the Church uses the image of light which will become increasingly important, and climaxing with the blessing of the Paschal Candle and the entrance into the Church. Christ IS the Light of the World. He comes to bring us out of darkness into the light by **the gift of Faith**. (See second reading)

## **Why does John recount the miracle of the man born blind?**

Firstly, the significance that this man was blind from birth. To the Jews that created a problem since affliction was regarded as coming from sin and in this case how could he have sinned or was it his parents? Our Lord is going to point the way to an important rethinking of suffering: not just as a result of sin (either personal or communal) but as a means of joining oneself to Christ's passion and therefore, we have now **redemptive suffering**. Truly we should have joy that our Lent, our sufferings are redemptive. This was foreshadowed in a very important book of the Old Testament: the book of Job. Job is a type (figure) of Christ since he suffers although innocent. Although, difficult reading this book can be very revealing.

## **What is the most important miracle that happens?**

The account of John is masterly and humorous but the climax is not the cure but what comes at the end: namely, the man's profession of faith in Jesus: "Lord I believe." Throughout the Gospels, Jesus cures people not simply to make their lives easier but to increase their faith and love of him. Throughout the account, the man makes a profound journey. He speaks the truth and is prepared to accept rejection from the Pharisees rather than deny the truth. It may not seem a big deal to us, but the man was cast out of the synagogue because he stuck up for the truth; that meant a complete cutting off from society – he paid a heavy price for following the truth. But it leads him to **the greatest gift of all – the completely freely bestowed gift of faith**. It is that gift that should bring with it a spiritual joy and dedication to the gospel and being prepared to endure anything for the sake of the gospel truth. Note: being loyal to natural truth leads us with certainty to the supernatural truth of which it is in fact a part.

## **To believe is to see things in God's light.**

Often the evil of this world can get us down: adversity in our lives, economic hardship, anger in people etc and indeed the world is full of these things – "How can we see love when everything points the other way? We do not see it – we believe it. To believe is to see things in God's light; to leave everything to Him who says 'your bodily eyes and reason only see evil, but this is superficial. At the bottom of everything is love.....Believe my Word.' Faith does call for a big sacrifice but this same faith gives us a sense of security and peace, which might almost be called infinite, so surely does it rest on the word of God Himself. Here we have the profound secret of Christian serenity in the midst of the most painful trials, which are only passing, whereas the word of God is something eternal." (taken from a Carthusian monk "They Speak by Silences.")

## Gratitude

Lastly, we should meditate deeply on something that we are in danger of taking for granted: the gift of our faith. At mass, we too like the man born blind make our profession of faith in the creed and worship at the consecration when the same Christ who cured the man is present on our altar. This is indeed the pearl of great price, for which we must be prepared to sell everything to gain, for with this pearl we gain entrance into the greatest prize of all: eternal life. And what is eternal life? "To know the one true God and Him whom He sent, Jesus Christ."

Have we set some time aside this Lent to allow Jesus to enlighten us through his holy Word?

1. Do we use our labours, our sufferings, to redeem? Do we offer them up for people in reparation for sin?
2. Have we meditated and thanked God for the great gift of the faith which truly allows us to understand the world, our role in it and the end for which we were created? Gratitude is the base for spiritual advancement and to entreat God for more gifts.
3. Like the blind man who had to endure exile from the synagogue are we prepared to let nothing stop us from declaring that Jesus is truly the Son of Man?
4. Do we prayerful read and ponder the Scriptures? Essential, essential, essential.....

Some interesting Scripture passages to read in this context: To understand the depth of today's liturgy we must read Chapter 21 of Revelation (the Apocalypse). This passage also interlinks with Isaiah Chp 66 from which the Entrance Antiphon is taken. Lastly, St. Paul's letter to the Philippians Chp 4 which tell us to rejoice.

God bless and may He speed us on our way to Glory,



Father Dominic O'Connor