

Homily For the 4th Sunday of Lent - Year B

St. Peter's Sunday Masses - March 10, 2024

2 Chronicles 36:14-23 "The Lord sent messengers because he had compassion on his people."

Psalms 137:1-6 "How could we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?"

Ephesians 2:4-10 "By grace you have been saved through faith, not your doing but a gift from God."

John 3:14-21 "."

Lifted Up

Introduction

Perhaps you are thinking that you should have gone to mass at 5:00 pm yesterday before the time change. But congratulations for getting up early to be with the Lord and God's people. We are silly creatures sometimes aren't we? This weekend we take an hour off the morning and add it to the evening and think we have a longer day.

But we Catholics do different things at different times of the year. Easter is our daylight savings time. It is the time that what Jesus did really does save us. It's not just pretend. It's not an attempt to manipulate time or space or God. What Jesus did is for all time and all places. He is our daylight. God is light and in him there is no darkness.

Today, in this Laetare Sunday ("Rejoice Sunday"), the fourth Sunday of Lent. This weekend begins a great movement towards the peak experience for the community of the Christian faith. That's Easter. Lent is our time to recognize our sinfulness, not so we can feel badly about ourselves, but so we can respond to the invitation to the feast with the Son of God who is always and perfectly faithful.

In the time of Jesus, it would have been common for people to use words from the scriptures when talking to each other. For us this would be like saying to someone in a conversation: Do to others what you would like them to do to you, or "fight the good fight" or "He's a wolf in sheep's clothing" or "Rise and shine" or "Go the extra mile" or "By the skin of your teeth" or "a fly in the ointment". You

get the idea. We hardly know that these are expressions directly from the bible, but in Jesus' day they would know that these were scriptural passages.

2 Chronicles

One of those biblical expressions used today is what we might say about a person on a sports team or a business organization is going to take the team to the promised land. By that, we mean that someone is going to finally bring success to the team or organization. In today's passage from the 2nd Book of Chronicles, the Israelites were in Babylon. They were taken from the Promised Land, literally the land that God had promised Abraham centuries earlier. The promised land wasn't a Stanley Cup hockey championship.

Psalms

The psalm beautifully explains what the loss of the promised land was like for them. Imagine the double experience of the Israelites. They are exiled from their land, but they are also exiled from their former relationship with God. That is a much deeper exile. God seems to have forsaken them. They feel like Christ on the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me." Then, to rub it in further, their captors made fun of them and asked them to sing the songs they used to sing in Israel. This would be just like those who jeered at Jesus: If you are the Son of God, save yourself and come down from the cross. Possibly the worst hurt of all is that they know this is what just naturally happens to a nation that turns away from God to idols. That's where our culture, our society, may be able to relate to the Israelite experience, as we turn from the God who saves to the passing idols of our time.

John

The bible is the most beloved book in history. The four Gospels are the most beloved books of the bible. And John 3:16 is the most beloved verse from the Gospel of John. And this statement from that verse is the most loved: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him

will not perish but will have eternal life." Jesus is explaining to the Pharisee, Nicodemus, what it will take to be saved.

But what is salvation? Salve is a healing ointment. Salvation is healing. But what need is there of healing? Well, it is our broken relationship with God. We have this disease that cannot be salved unless we ask go to the one who has the only healing salve for what ails our wounded hearts. It's like the spy movie where there is only one antidote to the poison. We go to other places to find something that will make us feel less lonely or less alienated. But that pain in our hearts can only be healed by grace, the free gift of God. It can't be healed by binge watching TV shows. It can't be healed by video games. It can't be healed by pornography or food. We binge consume because the hole in our hearts can only be healed by one thing. St. Augustine's phrase applies here: Our hearts are restless until they rest in God.

Jesus was lifted up on the cross. It is strange that, in this prediction of what will happen to him, so that Nicodemus will know what is to happen. Jesus compares that lifting up on the cross to when the Israelites were in the desert complaining about everything, including the manna that God provided for them. They got poisonous snakes for their complaining. God told Moses to make a bronze serpent, put it on a pole and have the people look at it to be healed. So, facing the poisonous thing that was there because they had sinned, became the way they were healed. Jesus knows that it is the sin of all people that will put him on the cross. When they looked at him then, just as we are asked to look at him now, we see in his blood and his broken body, the antidote to the result of our sins. The source of suffering is now the cause of our healing, our salvation. His blood is now the salve, the ointment, that saves us.

Ephesians

How are we saved? It's faith. But how do we have faith? But some have faith more easily. Does that mean God wants to save some and not others? Far from it. Faith needs help. That help is called grace. What is grace? Well it is a free gift. That's what we know. It is the gift that makes possible what God wants to give us.

God so loved the world, not because the world deserved his love. That's how we think in the world. We think we have to deserve what we get. And in the world that's the way it works. We don't get a working wage unless we work. We don't get groceries unless we hand over some money.

People have different reasons for going to mass. You are here on the 4th Sunday of Lent for a reason. Sometimes people go to mass hoping something will happen to their hearts that will give them the faith that seems just to flow out of the people around them. St. Thomas Aquinas wondered why some people just seemed naturally to have a lot of faith and others, through no fault of their own, had less. He realized that God made us different in faith just like we are in every other way unique individuals. And so God only expects of us what he has given us the capacity for. The one who has great faith and the one who has less faith must both use the gift they have and God will meet them right there.

Call To Conversion

That is why Lent is such a gift to us if we will receive it. During Lent, we pray, fast and give, in contradiction to the values of the world. Lent is a journey. It is our journey. The Church, which is Christ, gives it to us for our benefit.

Lent is a journey. It is our journey. The Church, which is Christ crucified and resurrected, gives it to us for our benefit. With Easter around the corner, let us be freed of our sins in the confessional and in our looking upon him lifted up. It is never too late to ask Jesus to flood our souls, our minds, our hearts, with the true light of faith. Walk in the light today. Look upon Jesus Christ lifted up and be saved.