

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent, 10 March 2024

Scriptures: 2 Chron. 36:14-16,19-23; Eph. 2:4-10; John 3:14-21

Homily: Fr. Ken

In the first reading, from the second Book of Chronicles, we find that God's people have become persistent in pursuing their own way of life, ignoring God. Consequently, they find themselves exiled from the land promised to them. But because of a Gentile, a non-Jew, named Cyrus, God worked through him to restore the people to their land and their original relationship with God.

In the second reading, from St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians, we are reminded that the great gift of God's love comes to us in the person of Jesus Christ, and fills our everyday lives in the Spirit.

In the Gospel, we have the narrative of Nicodemus and Jesus. Nicodemus comes to see Jesus at night. In the shadows of this conversation of wondering and searching, Jesus speaks of the love of God and the healing that is made possible for all people through the gift of Jesus' own life, the sacrifice of his death on the cross.

What pervades the scripture readings at the beginning of this fourth week of Lent, is love—our struggles to love, and God's own infinite love.

The message is clear: Jesus' coming among us is never a matter of making us feel useless, but is always about God's reaching out in order that we may share in the divine life. What is striking is that God's loving of us is not to do with how good we are, or even how hard we try. Quite the opposite: it is when we find ourselves "dead through our sins" that God comes closest to us. These moments are often surprising in the way they work: through nothing of our own efforts, but only through God's calm, enduring love—God's grace. In the end, it is through the tragedy of Jesus'

passion and death that we know the fullness of God's love. The total trust of Jesus in God's love, even at the darkest moments, is what we are all called to share.

Becoming God's instrument in our world means handing ourselves over to be recreated in Christ, shaped by God's love, and given a new life in the Holy Spirit. This happens most profoundly when we give up on our own efforts: when we know ourselves finally exiled, lost, at the dead end of our own plans and weaknesses. When we realize that what we have driven out is Christ, then we can look to God and God's love, and be healed.

Thinking about this during Lent is especially important. We are encouraged to observe Lent through quiet prayer, more frequent fasting, and in a greater sharing of what we have.

At this stage in Lent, some may be feeling they just can't do it—they are not up to the enthusiastic commitments made at the start of Lent. And there may be others who are feeling pleased at what a "successful" Lent they are having; they have stuck to their disciplines and are beginning to feel pretty pleased with their spiritual progress. Of course, in their own ways, both these places are places of wilderness shaped by our determination to be self-reliant, achieving our own goodness.

What the joy of this "Laetare" Sunday calls us to is something else: a real acknowledgement of our real human situation as the place of God's infinite and saving—and often surprising—love for us.

So, we can be fulfilled in our Lent's journey, and share that happiness of God's love with others a little more during the upcoming week ahead. Next time we are faced with new or continuing challenges, let us turn first to Jesus, to know the joy and comfort of his help and friendship in all our attempts to more genuinely love one another.

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