

Fourth Sunday of Lent B2024

Up to now I told you that Lent is a time of fight against evil, a time of making a choice in favor of God and a time for true worship of God. Let me add another dimension today. Lent is also the time of experiencing the merciful love of God. The merciful love of God causes us to be joyful at the certainty that whatever might be the darkness in which we live, God is capable of setting us free. Thus, we call traditionally this day, the “Laetare Sunday”, that is, the Sunday of joy. It is not because Lent is half-over, but rather because our salvation is at hand as Easter approaches.

The merciful love of God is evidenced in today’s first reading by what God did for his people. In those times, Israel sunk more and more into sin. The princes of the people, the priests and the people itself added infidelity over infidelity; they practiced abominations and polluted the temple with unhealthy behaviors.

Though God sent them messengers and prophets to bring them in the right path, they ignored them until their enemies destroyed the country, killed many by the sword and took the rest into captivity in Babylon. However, God did not abandon them to their sad fate. In his love and compassion, he raised King Cyrus to help his people return back to the land of their ancestors and to reconstruct the temple.

The history of the relationship of God with Israel is the history of the relationship of each one of us with God. Although we continually sin against God and his commandments, he remains faithful to us and never abandons us. He is always at our search until he finds us and takes us back to him. Like the unfaithful people of Israel, as soon as one leaves God, he finds himself in trouble and misery. But, there is no prison or dark place that cannot be reached by God. No chains can resist the strength of his powerful love. He comes always back to rescue us and sets us free.

That history of God’s merciful love is the main message of St Paul in today’s second reading. As he says: God is rich in mercy, because of the rich love he had for us. Because of that love, while we were dead in our transgressions and sins, he brought us to life through his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

The history of God’s love for us is displayed in today’s Gospel in such a way that we see clearly how in the sending of Jesus into the world, God wanted to express the abundance of his love for us. The passion and the death of Jesus on the cross are the ultimate consecration of God’s love for us, but through which we are saved from the final damnation.

When John says that God loved so the world that he gave his son, he is inviting us to acknowledge the grandeur of God’s love for us. As human experience has taught us, for the love of their children, parents accept to sacrifice everything for their good and happiness.

That is exactly what God has done by sending Jesus in the world. He loved us so much that he did not hesitate to send his only begotten son into the world. Our Lord, in turn, loved us so much that he gave us everything, and ultimately his own life on the cross for our salvation.

The death of our Lord on the cross, so bitter it might be, is the ultimate proof of God's love to the world. The cross itself is a grace through which we experience God's love. Then, we understand why our Lord says that as Moses lifted the serpent, he will be lifted on the cross to give life to those who believe in him.

When our Lord says that whoever believes in him is not condemned and whoever does not believe is already condemned, he is inviting us to the accountability of our faith. Our perdition and our salvation depend entirely upon us and upon our attitude toward our Lord. It is not our Lord who condemns us, because the Father did not send him to condemn the world, but so that it might be saved. We condemn ourselves when we exclude our Lord from our life and when we do not make his word the guiding principle of our lives.

Whatever might be our personal record in the past or in the present, the only thing God wants is that we change and be saved. Therefore, salvation comes to those who have the courage to change the trajectory of their lives. Those who opt for rebellion, selfishness, easy pleasures, self-interests and easy satisfaction condemn themselves to evident death. Again, it is not Christ who condemns, but each one does when he takes stand against our Lord.

That is why we are responsible for our death and our eternal salvation. What we do to belong to our Lord and to fulfill his word in our life plays a big role in determining our destiny. For sure, on the part of God, there is a real desire that we might be saved, but he cannot save us without us, that is, without our consent. We have to accept to cooperate. What we do in response to God's desire counts a lot for our future. A good choice leads to salvation while a bad choice leads to perdition.

How many times we have missed opportunities to make peace with God and ourselves! How many times we have preferred darkness to the light of Christ! Human history is repeatedly the same with its stubbornness of heart and lack of openness to God's grace. And yet the mercy of God is always within our reach. His door is always open to those who are lost and are strayed. What is needed is just courage to make the first step.

Brothers and Sisters let us leave darkness behind us and come to the Light of Christ. If we choose the way of light, we opt for life; if we choose the way of darkness, we opt for death. Let us experience the merciful love of Christ this Lent through the Sacrament of Confession. May this Lenten season helps us respond positively to the love of God shown in Jesus Christ.

2 Chronicles 36: 14-16, 19-23; Ephesians 2: 4-10; John 3: 14-21



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