

IV LENT 2018

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

FATHER CRAIG LOONEY

GALATIANS 4.21-31 ST. JOHN 6.1-14

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We're about mid-way through the Season of Lent. It's time to take a break...not the coffee hour kind...that comes later this morning. But we are taking the opportunity to lighten things up a bit.

The first thing we noticed when we arrived for Mass...the pink flowers at the High Altar...flowers are not seen at Sunday Masses during Lent except for today. The pink flowers and rose-colored vestments worn by the priest give today it's popular nickname...Rose Sunday. Rose is a lighter color than the more somber violet associated with Lent.

"Laetare Sunday" is a lesser-known name for today...from the opening words in Latin to the Introit sung at the beginning of Mass..."Rejoice, O Jerusalem"...giving us a message of hope and expectation for things to come. Traditionally, this Sunday has been a day of celebration within the austere Season of Lent.

We also get two other nicknames for today from the readings...Mothering Sunday from the Epistle...Refreshment Sunday from the Gospel.

In the Epistle, our friend Saint Paul counters the false teaching of a group within the Galatian church that was insisting Gentile converts had to become observant Jews before they could become members of the Church. Paul responds to this preaching of what he calls a "different Gospel" in harsh words...his tough-love approach to getting people to rethink what they are saying and how they are acting:

"You foolish Galatians! Who put a spell on you? Before your very eyes you had a clear description of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross! Tell me this one thing: did you receive God's Spirit by doing what the Law requires or by hearing the gospel and believing it? How can you be so foolish?"

Paul follows with an allegorical story mostly lost on 21st century Christians...we are 4000 years removed from the time of Abraham and Sarah. What we should try to get out of the story is just as God kept his promise to

Abraham and Sarah when Isaac was born, he keeps his promise to us and has set us free from sin and death through the life, work, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Paul reminds us we are God's People who have been called to hear and respond to the Good News about Jesus and to believe it with all our heart, mind and soul. We first hear the Good News from our parents...and it is reinforced in Church. In Paul's allegorical story...Jerusalem on Earth is both Heaven and the Church...a theme woven throughout today's hymns...and the Church is where we begin to understand what it means to be truly set free from sin and death.

The Church is where and how we experience heaven on earth...at this very moment. We call the Church our Mother...and she is. Mothers nurture and guide us and keep us out of harms way. It's the job of all of us to point the way to what Saint Paul calls our true mother, the heavenly Jerusalem. It's the job of the Church to make certain everyone hears the Good News and no one gets left behind. No one is excluded, unless they want to be excluded.

And it is in Church...through the Sacrament of Holy Communion...that we get refreshed with the Body and Blood of Jesus...and not in a symbolic way...in a real and Incarnational way...Jesus feeds us with his living Body and Blood. Every Sunday and not just the Fourth Sunday in Lent...is Refreshment Sunday.

After Jesus had satisfied the hunger of the large crowd in the Gospel...he instructs his disciples to pick up the leftover food...so nothing would be wasted...nothing would get thrown away. There is plenty of Jesus to go around...we do have to respond.

Next Sunday we begin Passiontide...the final two weeks in the Season of Lent. Things are going to get serious in a hurry. Jesus knows what's ahead for him...so do we!

It's good we have this time out in the Lenten Season to lighten things up a bit...to get refreshed...to get ready for what's next...always reminding ourselves hope never fails us.

We can rejoice...knowing the darker days of Passiontide ahead for Jesus and for us will not last...Easter will!

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