

IV LENT 2019

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

FATHER CRAIG LOONEY

GALATIANS 4.21-31 St. JOHN 6.1-14

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It's time to lighten things up a bit. We're about halfway through the Season of Lent. We're giving ourselves some breathing room before things start heating up next week.

The *Book of Common Prayer* doesn't give any special titles to the Fourth Sunday in Lent...but among Anglicans today is known by several special names: *Rose Sunday*, *Mothering Sunday*, *Refreshment Sunday* and *Laetare Sunday*. All of these titles have the common theme of hope...uplifting our spirits while we continue our Lenten journey toward Good Friday.

Rose Sunday gets its name from the rose-colored vestments worn by the clergy and pink flowers decorating the High Altar for today only...a brief oasis of color in an otherwise somber season of violet.

We get the name *Mothering Sunday* from the Epistle. Paul reminds us our true citizenship is in heaven, which he calls our "true Mother". Our citizenship in heaven is not a matter of our pedigree...it's a gift from God made possible only by Jesus reconciling us to him by his death on the cross. It was also customary, especially in England, for people to visit their mothers on Mothering Sunday...and to visit their "mother" church...the parish church in which they were baptized.

The name *Refreshment Sunday* comes from the Gospel. The disciples doubted Jesus could feed so many people from a young boy who was willing to give up his small lunch. God knows what we need and Jesus wasn't about to let the crowd go away hungry. And there was plenty of food left after everyone had lunch. Jesus refreshes us in more ways than we can imagine. He takes our sincere gifts of ordinary bread and wine and returns them to us as his living Body and Blood. We receive an abundance of Jesus who sustains us even after we leave here today.

The lesser-known name for today, *Laetare Sunday*, comes from the opening words in Latin of the Introit said or sung at Mass. *Laetare* means rejoice...there is a joyful and celebratory element about today's Liturgy.

The four special titles we give the Fourth Sunday in Lent give us the chance to "lighten up" and at the same time prepare ourselves for what's next...Passiontide and Holy Week. Jesus knew from the moment he began his public ministry where it was going to lead him...it's a mission he took on for us...it was always about us. It's our mission to let the world know everything Jesus did was for us...to show God's unconditional love for the people he created...to reconcile us to himself.

Just before a man is ordained a priest, the bishop reads the long Exhortation that spells out the priest's mission and gives him a specific charge. He tells the priest he is to "teach, and to premonish, to feed and provide for the Lord's family; to seek for Christ's sheep that are dispersed abroad, and for his children who are in the midst of this naughty world, that they may be saved through Christ forever."

It's the Church's mission... "the present city of Jerusalem" and our earthly "Mother"...to point the way to "the heavenly Jerusalem, our True Mother." Mothers (and fathers) take care of their children and help them do the right thing. We leave here today refreshed by the Body and Blood of Jesus, knowing that the Church, our Mother, is taking care of us and nurturing us through Word and Sacrament, and preparing us for the day we will see God face-to-face in heaven.

Jesus tells us that he came so we might enjoy life to the fullest now and he promised one day those who die believing in him will join him in heaven. Our attention as we approach Passiontide will be to focus more and more on the Cross and Good Friday. God's promise to put us right with himself and set us free from sin and death will play itself out through the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus.

Today is about lightening things up a bit and we shouldn't feel guilty about doing so. We should be happy we have the opportunity to refocus before we continue our Lenten journey. Next week things will be different.

For now...lets rejoice and get refreshed!

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