

IV Lent 2022

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

*Galatians 4.21-31 St. John 6.1-14*



Rejoice, Mothering, Refreshment, and Rose...words that describe this mid-Lenten Sunday. Next week commences Passiontide and things will start getting more serious. But for today, we're taking a short break from our Lenten disciplines. We will have a lot to think about when we leave here today.

The opening word to the Introit, *Laetare*, means *Rejoice*, and comes from Isaiah 66.11-12...*"Rejoice with Jerusalem; be glad for her, all you that love this city! Rejoice with her now, all you that have mourned for her!"*...and Psalm 122...*"I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the Lord's house'"*. Jesus came to Jerusalem and defeated death and darkness once and for all time. Our liturgical observance of his passion and suffering is just ahead...but Easter is also near. That gives us every reason to rejoice!

In the Epistle, Saint Paul calls Jerusalem our "Mother"...giving today its name "Mothering Sunday". We also call the Church our Mother. Beginning in the Middle Ages, Christians would visit their mother church...the parish in which they were baptized...or to the cathedral...the mother church of the diocese.

In writing to the Galatian Church, Paul is trying to correct some false teaching. A group within the Church called the Judaizers were demanding non-Jewish converts first become "good" Jews and do everything the Law requires, before they could become members of the Church. Saint Paul says that is wrong. To make his point, he tells the story of Abraham and his two sons, one by the servant girl, Hagar, the other by his wife, Sarah. The story is rich in allegory and a bit tough for 2nd Century Christians to understand.

We read in the Book of Genesis how God promised Abraham he would have a son by his wife Sarah. That message came to them from three visitors...angels. When Sarah overheard the conversation, she had a good laugh, since both she and Abraham were very old. They decided to give God a hand...they enlisted their servant girl, Hagar's help. They didn't trust God to keep his promise.

Abraham and Sarah should have taken God at his word. He already had a plan worked out. In spite of their lack of faith...God kept his promise anyway. Abraham and Sarah did have a son of their own...Isaac.

The point of today's Epistle is that God always keeps his promises. He promised to release the world from sin and death. With Jesus' arrival all people could be saved...not just a select few who tried to keep the Law and enforce rules and regulations on others. Jesus didn't cancel the Law...he made everything the Law and the Prophets talk about come true. God keeps his promise to us too.

Paul calls the Church "Jerusalem which now is". The Church mothers and nurtures us in our relationship with God and each other. What the Church does is point the way to "Jerusalem, which is above", Paul's metaphor for heaven. In heaven, our true mother, we will be nurtured and be truly free forever. The direct experience we have of heaven now is the Church.

Jesus also knows any talk about heaven doesn't mean much if the people you are talking to are starving. So he goes to work to solve that problem too. In the Gospel, he takes two small fish and five loaves of bread and blesses them. That's hardly enough food for a huge crowd, but Jesus has his disciples pass around the food, and everyone has enough to eat. Then, there are leftovers. Twelve baskets of food left over.

In Hebrew the number twelve means "completeness" and "abundance". Jesus takes care of our spiritual and physical needs. He makes us complete. We are refreshed and renewed at every Mass in hearing his Word and receive Holy Communion. We receive his grace and it is never exhausted.

Finally, the rose vestments and flowers at the High Altar also tell us this is a day we can take a deep breath and relax a little before continuing our Lenten journey. Next week things will look and feel different.

We have a lot to think about this week. Let's start by remembering God has a plan worked out for us...we need to trust he will carry through.

