

IV Lent 2023

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

Galatians 4.21-31 St. John 6.1-14

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It's the Fourth Sunday in Lent and time to take a short break from the more austere elements that define the Season of Lent. It's time to lighten things up a bit.

The opening words in Latin to the Introit to today's Mass, "*Laetare Jerusalem*" ("*Rejoice, O Jerusalem*") taken from the prophecy of Isaiah, invites us to rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her now; her mourning and ours will not last...things will get better.

Today is a day of celebration; even the Sundays in Lent are mini-Easters. We call this day "*Rose Sunday*". Pink flowers decorate the High Altar...the celebrant wears rose-colored vestments instead of the more somber violet. A refreshing change in our Lenten journey to the cross...but just for today.

We also call today "*Mothering Sunday*". Christians historically visited their mother church...the parish where they were baptized and made a "*child of Christ's Church*"...or to the cathedral...the mother church for all parishes in the diocese. The Church for all parish churches everywhere is the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

In the Epistle, Saint Paul calls the "*heavenly Jerusalem the Mother of us all*". He is talking about heaven. The Church is often called "*Holy Mother Church*". The Church on earth is the Incarnational presence of heaven on earth...we get a taste of what it will be like in heaven.

Paul's Letter to the Galatians is difficult for 21st Century Christians to understand, even in the Good News Bible. The story about Abraham, Sarah and Hagar is intended to correct some bad teaching within the Galatian Church.

A group of Jewish Christians in Galatia and other churches tried to force Levitical laws, including circumcision, on Gentile converts to Christianity. Paul tells the Galatians they got in wrong. They have missed the whole point of Jesus' Mission to set us free from being slaves to sin and death. The Church is One Body in Christ...what Zip Code we were born in doesn't matter. That is God's promise to us through Jesus.

The story of Abraham, Sarah and Hagar in Book of Genesis shows us God always keeps his promises. Abraham and Sarah were told they would have a child even though they were both more than 90 years old. They thought God meant for Abraham to have a child with their slave girl. Abraham and Hagar did have a son; not the one God promised. Later Abraham and Sarah had a son, Isaac. They should have trusted God to keep his promise.

The way we know God's promise to set us free is true is through his son, Jesus. Jesus tells us in many places in the Gospels he has come to set us free from sin, and to make it possible for us to enjoy true freedom in heaven. The Galatians obsession over the Levitical laws made them slaves to sin, to themselves and their own inflated egos. Paul's message applies to all of us today.

We also call today "*Refreshment Sunday*"...from the Gospel account of Jesus feeding 5000 people. Jesus didn't want the people to go away hungry. He took five barley loaves and two fish...the "*Gifts of Mother Earth*"...and fed the people. "*Gifts of Mother Earth*" does not refer to some pagan earth goddess. Jesus took the gifts of fish and bread made from barley God created and made certain people were fed before he sent them on their way. They went home refreshed.

And there was plenty of food left over...twelve baskets full. Jesus didn't want any food to go to waste. The Gospel doesn't tell us what Jesus did with the leftovers. We can be certain he didn't throw them away. The twelve baskets of leftover food have a symbolic meaning. The number "*12*" in Hebrew stands for completeness. It was God's plan to redeem mankind through his Son, Jesus...and to bring all people together in Christ's Church. God wants to make certain no one gets left out.

The Church, our Mother, teaches and sustains us in Word and Sacrament. We come here each week to get be strengthened by Jesus' Body and Blood. We leave here refreshed and renewed.

Next Sunday we commence Passiontide...the last two weeks of our Lenten journey to the cross. Things will get more serious...for Jesus and for us. But for today...we celebrate and rejoice!

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