

IV Lent 2024

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

Galatians 4.21-31 St. John 6.1-14



We're now about half way through the Season of Lent. It's time for us to lighten up a bit. Next Sunday we commence the final two weeks of Lent called Passiontide. Things will get more intense as we continue our Lenten journey to the cross and Good Friday.

The Fourth Sunday in Lent is known by several names...most commonly Rose Sunday, Mothering Sunday and Refreshment Sunday. Less known is Laetare Sunday, from the opening word in Latin to the Introit said by the Celebrant at the beginning of the Mass.

Laetare, means "rejoice", and it sets the tone for today's Mass. The prophet Isaiah wrote 700 years before the birth of Christ....*"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 the writer of Psalm 122 wrote...*"I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the Lord's house'".*

We also call today "Rose Sunday". The Celebrant wears rose-colored vestments instead of the more austere violet we associate with Lent. Flowers, not seen since the Last Sunday after Epiphany, once again decorate the High Altar for this Sunday only. The vestments and flowers give us a glimpse of joy that awaits us at Easter.

Today is also "Mothering Sunday", a name it gets from the Epistle and from the medieval custom of visiting the cathedral (The "Mother Church" of the diocese)...or the parish church where you were baptized. It's entirely proper for us to call Saint Joseph Parish as our mother church.

Paul wrote his Letter to the Galatian Christians to counter the teachings of the Judaizers...a group of Jewish Christians that came out of the Jerusalem Church. Paul considered this sect to be dangerous and divisive. The Judaizers insisted it was impossible to be truly Christian without keeping all of the Jewish dietary and other laws. This included circumcision for male Gentile converts.

Even in a modern translation of the Bible it's difficult for 21st Christians to understand what

Paul is talking about in the Epistle without having read the story of Abraham and Sarah in the Book of Genesis. Paul's use of allegory in his Letter would have resonated well among the Galatian Christians.

God sent three angels to Abraham who said he and his wife, Sarah, would have a son. Abraham was about 100 years old and Sarah was about 90 years old. They both thought this was the funniest they had ever heard and fell down laughing. Obviously God meant Abraham should have a son by their servant girl, Agar. Wrong!

Abraham and Sarah did have a son, Isaac. God kept his promise to Abraham and Sarah. God always keeps his promise. He promised he would free us from sin and death through his Son, Jesus. The Jewish laws served their purpose, but they could not free us from sin and death.

In the Epistle Paul calls the heavenly Jerusalem "Our Mother". The City of Jerusalem is where the Church began. The Church is indeed our mother because she nurtures and cares for us. The Church on Earth is how we begin to experience "Jerusalem which is above", Paul's metaphor for heaven. In heaven, our true mother, we will be nurtured and be truly free forever.

Today is also "Refreshment Sunday", a name it gets from the Gospel. Jesus has just finished teaching and healing. More than 5000 people were following him and they were hungry. Jesus knew any talk about heaven wouldn't mean much if people were starving. Jesus, the Man of Action, took two small fish and five loaves of bread and blessed them. Jesus had his disciples pass out the food. When everyone had eaten he told his disciples to gather the leftovers so nothing was wasted. There were twelve baskets of bread left over.

The Bible doesn't mention what happened to the twelve baskets of leftover bread. But it is clear Jesus didn't want any food thrown out...there were plenty of people still hungry and needing to be fed.

It's the Church's job...and we are the Church...to feed a spiritually hungry world with the Good News about Jesus. And no one should be left starving.

