

IV Lent 2025

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

Galatians 4.21-31



We're now about halfway through the Season of Lent. It's time to lighten things up a bit. The Fourth Sunday in Lent is called "Rose Sunday"...a name it gets from the rose-colored vestments worn by the clergy, instead of the more somber violet. Flowers once again are used at the High Altar. Today we celebrate and look forward to Easter.

This Lent, our Sunday Discussion Group has been focusing on the Covenants God has made with his people...what they are and what we learn from them. In the Bible, Covenants are sacred agreements between God and humanity, often involving promises and obligations. Next Sunday we commence Passiontide...we will see how God's Covenant with us through Jesus leads us to Good Friday and the cross.

Paul's Letter to the Galatians is all about Covenants. Galatia was a Roman province in central Asia Minor...present-day Turkey...that had been settled by immigrant Celts some 300 years earlier. Paul was the missionary bishop who founded a number of parishes in Galatia early in his ministry.

Most of the converts in the Galatian parishes came from pagan backgrounds. They were very happy to hear the Good News about Jesus Christ. They too could be put right with God through Jesus and welcomed as full members into the Church Community. They too would be God's People.

Shortly after Paul left Galatia to continue his missionary work, some Jewish converts, who were called Judaizers, starting teaching in order for non-Jewish converts to become full members of the Church they first had to keep all or part of the Law of Moses. This included the dietary laws, ritual observance of the Sabbath, and circumcision of non-Jewish males.

Our friend Saint Paul, the man who minced no words, was not happy when he heard about the parish leaders were preaching a "different Gospel". Here is what he had to say...

...“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 isn't calling the Galatians foolish to insult them. He is deeply concerned and disappointed they had turned away from the Gospel of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. They were teaching salvation came through strict adherence to the Law of Moses. The Judaizers failed to understand what God's Covenant with them really meant.

The allegorical story Paul tells to make his point is lost on 21st century Christians. Abraham, Sarah and Hagar lived about 4000 years ago. We read in Genesis, God made a Covenant with Abraham and Sarah they would have a son in their old age. God kept his promise and Isaac was born, but not until Abraham and Sarah asked Hagar to be a surrogate.

The two women, Paul tells us, represent the two Covenants. Hagar stands for the Old Covenant that keeps people in slavery; Sarah stands for the New Covenant that sets us free from sin and death through Jesus. It's important for us to remember Jesus never said he came to cancel the Law of Moses (the Old Covenant). He came to make it come true through his death on the cross (New Covenant). Father Herb will have more to say about this in the Sunday Discussion Group.

We are God's People. We gather at Mass to hear God's Word, receive it into our hearts, and share the Good News with others. Our friend, Paul calls the Church, Jerusalem on Earth. He is not referring to a building; he means we are the Church. When we hear the Good News about Jesus in Church, we learn to embrace the freedom Saint Paul is talking about...a freedom that comes from our faith in Christ.

It's often said the Mass is the closest we have to experiencing Heaven on Earth. Paul calls the Church our Mother. We also call today "Mothering Sunday", from the custom that developed in the Middle Ages of visiting the parish in which one was baptized, or the Cathedral, which is the Mother Parish of the Diocese. It's the Church's job to point the way to what Saint Paul calls our true Mother, the heavenly Jerusalem. Today's Introit taken from the Prophecy of Isaiah (66.10) invites all of us who love Jerusalem to rejoice with her; all of us who have shed tears for her to join in happy singing.

Our friend, Paul, has given us Good News. The Church, Jerusalem on Earth, has a message to share with others. Jesus has set us free. God has made a New Covenant with us through his Son. He has kept his promise. We have every reason to celebrate!

