

4th Sunday of Lent - B
2 Chronicles 36:14-16, 19-23;
Ephesians 2:4-10;
John 3:14-21
Little Flower - 3/14/21

My Brothers and Sisters,

The Fourth Sunday of Lent is also called Laetare Sunday. *Laetare* is a Latin word which means *rejoice*. Today the Church rejoices because we are midway on our journey from Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday. Likewise, today we rejoice in God's superabundant and passionate love for us.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life." Until the pandemic, we could not watch a televised sporting event without seeing at least one *John 3:16* sign. With these words, Jesus revealed God's superabundant and passionate love for us. *"And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life."* Jesus' love for us is equally superabundant and passionate and also sacrificial. As Jesus said at the Last Supper, *"No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends"* [Jn.15:13].

At the Last Supper, Jesus also defined eternal life: *"And eternal life is this: to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent"* [Jn. 17:3]. Eternal life, then, is to know God and to be known by God, to love God and to be loved by God, i.e., to be in relationship with God.

In last Sunday's homily, I mentioned that Old and New Testament morality was covenant morality and, therefore, relational morality. Consequently, throughout the Old Testament, fidelity and infidelity were key themes. We are told that God was ever faithful to his Covenant with Israel while Israel time and time again was unfaithful to God. Because Old Testament morality was covenant or relational morality, in the Old Testament, all sins were ultimately sins of infidelity. For example, in today's first reading, we heard, *"Likewise all the princes of Judah, the priests and the people added infidelity to infidelity...."*

Therefore, during this Lenten season, as we strive to deepen our covenant relationship with God, it might be good for us to look at our lives through the prism of fidelity. How faithful are we in our relationship with God? Do we pray to God daily? Do we attend Sunday Eucharist every Sunday? Do we have other gods in our lives? Are we faithful in our efforts to keep God's commandments as Christ taught us? How faithful are we in our relationships with others, especially family and friends? Do we work to maintain and develop our relationships with family and friends? Are we willing to make and keep commitments to others? Are we true to ourselves? Are our lives consistent with our deepest beliefs and values?

Light and darkness are also key themes in both the Old and New Testaments. Jesus said, *"For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come toward the light, so that his works might not be exposed."* During this Lenten season, therefore, we might want to ask ourselves if there are parts of our lives, usually addictions or addictive behaviors, that we would never want exposed to anyone because of shame. If so, we might want to spend the remaining weeks of Lent addressing these parts of ourselves, bringing them into the healing, forgiving light of Christ and working to change them.

My brothers and sisters, during Lent, as we focus on dying to selfishness and sin, we want to focus on our goal—rising to new life with Christ. In his Letter to the Ephesians, Paul makes a beautiful statement about us who have been redeemed by Christ. Paul wrote, *"For we are his [God's] handiwork."* If we really believe this, every day we should pray the prayer of the Psalmist: *"Truly you have formed my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I give you thanks that I am fearfully, wonderfully made; wonderful are your works"* [Ps. 139:13-14].