

Homily for the 4th Sunday of lent – Year B – 2021

[2 Chr 36:14-16, 19-23](#) ; [Eph 2:4-10](#) ; [Jn 3:14-21](#)

“God’s love and mercy overwhelm us”

Dearly Beloved, welcome to this 4th Sunday in lent. This Sunday is sometimes called *Laetare* Sunday. *Laetare*, is a Latin word that means “rejoice.” Traditionally, Sundays are named after the first word of the liturgy’s opening antiphon. On this Sunday, the antiphon is taken from the book of the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 66:10-11). Even as we observe our Lenten sacrifices, we rejoice in anticipation of the joy that will be ours at Easter. The joy of this day is extended throughout the readings; though we are sinners, God’s merciful love saves us in a way that we cannot imagine.

Fr. Boniface shares a story about a bishop who receives conflicting reports about a visionary in his diocese. He decides to pay an unscheduled visit to the visionary. After hearing her stories, the bishop was still in doubt and so he told her that whenever the Lord appears to her again, she should ask Him to tell her the sins he (the bishop) confessed, at his most recent confession and the visionary accepted.

One week later, the bishop receives a phone call from the visionary indicating that the Lord visited her, and she remembered to ask the question. The bishop would not listen further on the phone but called the visionary to the office. When they were by themselves, the bishop was curious to know what the Lord said to the visionary about his sins, and he was a bit nervous. “What did the Lord say about the sins I confessed during my last confession?” The bishop asked with his voice shaking slightly. The visionary looked at him directly in the eyes in response and said:

The Lord says that he cannot remember any of your sins because his merciful love is so powerful that it cleared all the sins away when you confessed, and there is no remembrance of them anymore. However, he said that he would be happy if you don’t commit those sins again.

The bishop was confused and overwhelmed at the same time. The prelate thanked her and promised to stay in touch. Then the bishop called his vicar general who was also a scripture scholar and shared the report with him. The vicar general’s response was, “she is absolutely right.” “How would God not remember the sins I confessed, is He no longer the all-knowing God?” The bishop asked. The priest then looks to scripture to convince the bishop. He gives the following quotations to the bishop.

- Isaiah 43:25 – “I, I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins.”
- 2nd 5:19 – “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.”
- 8:12 – “For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.”

Beloved, God is more interested in our glorious future than in our unproductive past. From the answer of the visionary to the bishop, we understand that God is not concerned about our past sins and

mistakes, but going forward, He needs us to become better or as some would say, “better than yesterday.”

The First Reading (2 Chron. 36:14-16, 19-23) tells us how all the people of Israel, without exception, offended God by adding infidelity to infidelity. God gave them time to turn back, but they refused and even revolted against His messengers, and this brought about the Babylonian captivity or exile. After many years, God’s merciful love goes in search of the people and through a pagan king, Cyrus of Persia, the survivors among people received the grace of restoration to the Promised Land. However, not all were willing to go back to begin all over again.

We are all sinners (Eccles. 7:20; Romans 3:23), we often fail to be faithful to God though He remains faithful because He cannot deny His own self (2 Tim. 12:13). Despite our sins, God is continually looking out for us like He did for the people of Israel and He is ready to have us back if only we could turn back to Him (Jer. 15:19). St. Paul explains to us in the Second Reading (Eph. 2:4-10) that our reconciliation and salvation is by the grace of God; though we were dead in our transgressions, God brought us back and saved us by His grace. The fact is, not all see the need to go back especially when they are comfortable with their current situation. For some, it will take an invasion that will unsettle them to get their attention.

Friends, God does not want any of us to die for our sins. The incarnation is proof of God’s desire for our salvation. The Gospel Reading (John 3:14-21), tells us among other things that God sent His Son (leveraging on his love) so that the world might be saved through Him. I remember sharing with you this quote from John 3:16 as the summary of the entire bible. The only clause for our salvation however is “your belief”; *“everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.”*

Belief refers to our faith in God’s merciful love to forgive our sins and wipe them out completely. Often, we tie ourselves to our past sins even when we have confessed them. Some people allow their past sins to limit them from making a saintly future. Today’s message tells us that God does not count, nor does He remember our confessed past. God does not deal with us according to our sins nor reward us according to our iniquities (Psalm 103:10); David asked: “If God should remember and count our guilt, who can stand?” (Psalm 130:3). The truth again is *“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.”*

St. Paul, in the second reading highlights the grace of God in action. Today, we rejoice because God has shown us mercy through His grace. However, Paul calls our attention to a very important point and question *“...Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?”* (Rom 6, 1). Of course, the answer is, no! The reason is, that we must not take anything for granted. We have a part to play. God’s grace has been poured out to save us. However, we must reach out to fetch it. Availing yourself to the celebration of the sacrament; being consistent with a prayer life that suits your life style; learning to live well with others through love and sacrifice etc. and being convinced that God loves you and always will.