

4th Sunday of Lent (B)

11th March 2018

'Laetare: we rejoice in God's love and the love of a Mother'

2Chr 36: Cyrus ends the exile Eph 2: *it is by grace that you have been saved*

Jn 3: 14–21: *God loved the world so much that He gave His only Son*

At the mid-point of Lent, *Laetare* Sunday, which also doubles up as Mothers' Day, we take a moment's breather from the rigours of Lent and the penance of Lent, and acknowledge that Easter is on the way — just three weeks' time. There is a special joy about *Laetare* Sunday — in fact, that's what the word '*laetare*' means: 'rejoice'! Yes, we can rejoice, even in the midst of the extra fasting, prayer, and almsgiving of Lent, because of the salvation won for us in Christ's Death and Resurrection. As we heard, there, at the heart of today's Gospel passage: "*God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not be lost but may have eternal life.*" This sentence, so beloved of many Christians, is the 'Gospel in miniature,' a timeless expression of just what it means that the Son of God came into this world: "God loved the world so much ..." that He came to save us, sinners. Yes, we most certainly rejoice. Halfway through

Lent, we take stock, we remind ourselves of why we are keeping Lent at all: it's to turn again to the God who "so loved the world."

It's good, then, to have this passage from St John, today, to allow us to be re-invigorated in our keeping of Lent. Let's allow our deeds to come out into the light; let's open up our lives to the kindly light of Jesus ... are our deeds fitting and right for a Christian, one who claims to love and follow Christ? He did not come to condemn, so we do not need to feel belittled, even in our sinfulness, but we do need to feel challenged: challenged by His mercy to seek ever more faithful ways of following Him; in other words, responding in love to the limitless divine love that made Him enter this world, God made man.

What is our assessment of Lent, for ourselves, so far. Let's ponder that for a minute. What fasting have we done? What prayer? What almsgiving? What plans for Confession? All these things we do as a response to God's perfect love for us — what would we say we are managing to do, out of love for Him? Perhaps we

feel we have tried hard this Lent ... Perhaps we feel we haven't (yet) ... but the best thing is that there is still another half of Lent to go. The Lord calls to us, even now, to take a fresh start at Lent, to give to Him what remains of this holy season of penance.

But, first, let's enjoy *Laetare* Sunday, let's be encouraged by the love of the Lord, and by His forgiveness and compassion, as we enter this 2nd half of Lent. And let's also honour our mothers. Whether they are living or dead, let's pray for them, and thank God for them. Maybe they are round the corner; maybe they are far away, but let's make sure that in some way this Mothering Sunday we honour them for their love and their sacrifices. No mother is perfect — except Our Blessed Lady, of course — but for most of us, our mother will have been a most significant influence on us, both emotionally and often spiritually too.

I like it that we keep to this tradition of Mothering Sunday's being tied to Lent, because it also reminds us of the great example of motherhood that is Our Blessed Lady, especially as she follows Christ right to Calvary. Often as

we pray the Stations of the Cross, it is through the eyes of Mary, and accompanying her, that we view and ponder the sufferings of Jesus's Passion. Our Lady is the model of motherhood, faithful to her Son to the bitter end: "*At the Cross, her station keeping, stood the mournful Mother, weeping, close to Jesus to the last.*" All motherhood has its joys and its sorrows, but Our Lady is patron saint of keeping faith in the tough times of life, because she knows perfectly as a human being what it means to follow Christ and to trust in Him throughout life. She it is who is our heavenly mother who constantly urges us, and prays for us, to be close to Christ Jesus. So let us also honour her, too, at the heart of this Lent 2018, and implore her maternal intercession as we commit ourselves to the remainder of this penitential season: "*O thou Mother! fount of love! Touch my spirit from above, make my heart with thine accord: Make me feel as thou hast felt; make my soul to glow and melt with the love of Christ my Lord.*"