

Fourth Sunday of Lent
March 5-6, 2016
Readings: Joshua 5:9a, 10-12; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

“I am terrified of letting Jesus pass by”

Our parish was privileged to host the “24 Hours for the Lord,” an initiative of the Holy Father for the Jubilee Year of Mercy. In the Penance Service to open the period of twenty-four hours, the Holy Father referred to Bartimaeus. You may recall, in the 10th chapter of the Gospel of St. Mark, Bartimaeus is the man who cries out to the Lord as he is passing by. At the time, his persistence in calling again and again embarrassed the others. They rebuked him for having the audacity to say- “Son of David, have pity on me.”

The Holy Father encouraged the people in his homily: “Let us not remain sedentary, but let us get up and find our spiritual worth again, our dignity as loved sons and daughters who stand before the Lord so that we can be seen by him, forgiven and recreated.”¹

The Pope was hearkening back to a recent Lenten homily preached in his presence in which the priest was speaking about obedience to the Word of God. This obedience needs to be in the moment- it needs to be now.

A word of God has suggested an idea to you, it has placed on your heart a desire for a good confession, for a reconciliation, for an act of charity; it invites you to interrupt work for a moment and address an act of love to God. Do not delay, do not let the inspiration pass by. “Timeo Iesum transeuntem” (“I’m terrified of Jesus passing by”), said St. Augustine,” which is like saying, “I am terrified that his good inspiration is passing by and will not come back.”²

¹ Augustine, Sermon 88, 13: *Timeo enim Iesum transeuntem et manentem ed ideo tacere non possum.*

² Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, Second Lenten Sermon, “Receive with Meekness the Implanted Word,” 26 February 2016. He is the Preacher of the Papal Household.

In short– we need to strike while the iron is hot. Jesus is passing close by us, precisely so that we will not be afraid to call on him. So, what are we waiting for? The Lord is calling us to a very special encounter with Him in the great sacrament of mercy. We priests gave visible witness to the reality of sin in our own lives by beginning the twenty-four hour period with our own Penance Service, led by the Archbishop. Just the other day, the Pope addressed a group of priests in a special course of study surrounding the sacrament of Penance, a course I myself took ten years ago.

He reminded the priests that when they enter the confessional as confessors, they must always bear in mind that they are ‘instruments of God's mercy’ for the brothers and sisters they receive, and must therefore be careful “not to place obstacles to this gift of salvation. The confessor is himself a sinner, a man always in need of forgiveness, and he first of all cannot do without the mercy of God Who has 'chosen' and 'constituted' him for this great task ... for which he must prepare with an attitude of humble and generous faith, with the sole desire that all the faithful may experience the love of the Father.”³

Laetare Sunday is an appropriate day on which to hear the parable of the Prodigal Son. He realizes that he no longer even deserves to be called Son, due to his sins. That humble and honest admission is all too lacking in our world, and even at times in our Church. We have lost this sense of humility on account of our sins, and humility on account of the price paid for them by our Savior.

And still, we rejoice even in the midst of our long Lenten fast. On *Laetare* Sunday, we see small yet significant signs of joy in the rose-colored vestments, the beautiful flowers, the sound of the organ in the midst of Lent.

³ Pope Francis to the Course on the Internal Forum, Apostolic Penitentiary, March 3, 2016

Thus, the contrast between *Laetare* and the other Lenten Sundays is emphasized, and is emblematical of the joys of this life, restrained rejoicing mingled with a certain amount of sadness.

There is a common element that unites the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son, all of which are told in succession in Chapter 15 of Luke's Gospel. What do the shepherd who finds the lost sheep and the woman who finds her coin say? "Rejoice with me!" And what does Jesus say at the end of each parable? "There will be more joy in heaven for a converted sinner than for ninety-nine just people who have no need of repentance."

The entire fifteenth chapter has as its common theme that of rejoicing due to God's mercy and beneficence in our lives. This parable is about *joy*, the joy that comes from knowing God's love. That joy does not cover over the reality of sin, but rather when we are repentant, it removes the guilt of sin and fills our souls again with grace, enabling us to be true sons and daughters of God.

During this Jubilee Year, we are tremendously grateful for God's overflowing love and mercy. We have many, many reasons to rejoice today. Rejoice Jerusalem, rejoice in your Savior.