

LÆTARE IERUSALEM

Today is Lætare Sunday, from the first word in Latin of the introit antiphon, "Rejoice, Jerusalem!" We have reached the midpoint of Lent and know that the joy of Easter is not far off. The liturgy expresses this joy this weekend by the symbols of light and oil found in the readings, and by fading the penitential purple of the Lenten vestments to a more festive rose. The light and oil, symbols used in the baptismal liturgy, represent the enlightenment of faith, which the man born blind displays in today's Gospel, by which we, the baptized, are to live "as children of light, for light produces every kind of goodness and righteousness and truth." (Second Reading) The oil used to anoint David as king in the First Reading is a foreshadowing of the sacred chrism, the oil of consecration, used in the baptism of infants, in the administration of confirmation, and in the ordination of priests and bishops. Just as "the spirit of the Lord rushed upon David" when he was anointed by the prophet Samuel (First Reading), so God gives his Holy Spirit to the baptized, who share Christ's royal prophetic priesthood.

Today's Gospel is the second of the three long passages from John's Gospel originally intended for the instruction of the catechumens preparing for baptism at Easter. It reminds both the catechumens and us, the community of believers, that God's gift of faith enables us to acknowledge Jesus as the Christ, eliciting from us a profession of faith. The questioning of the man's parents about whether or not he had actually been blind from birth was due to the belief that, if one had lost his sight, he could possibly regain it by human intervention; but if he had never had sight, only God could give it. The healing of the man born blind, therefore, had to have been an act of God. It is the man born blind himself, then, who proclaims the point of the story: "It is unheard of that anyone ever opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he would not be able to do anything." (John 9:32-33) This passage contrasts the insight of faith with the blindness of those who refuse to believe. Let us recall these verses from the prologue of John's Gospel, from the passage read in the Mass of Christmas Day: "[T]he light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:5); and: "The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world." (John 1:9)

Throughout the season of Lent the Church exhorts us to "turn away from sin and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1:15) The sacrament of penance is the most powerful means of persevering in this resolve, because its grace is the result of Christ's obedient sacrifice for the redemption of the world. The Lenten discipline of prayer and penance finds its completion in a good confession and act of contrition. The prayer of absolution frees us from the sinful entanglements into which we fall. It renews in us the cleansing and life-giving waters of baptism we call "sanctifying grace." Take advantage of the opportunities for confession and the conversion it affords. Remember also to participate in Operation Rice Bowl or in some other charitable cause this Lent.

We celebrate two special feast days this week. The first is the Solemnity of Saint Joseph, Husband of Mary and Patron of the Universal Church, on Monday, March 20, transferred from March 19 because it falls on Sunday this year. We will celebrate this Solemnity at the 5:30 evening Mass on Monday. The second is the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord on Saturday, March 25. This is the feast of the Incarnation of God the Son as man through the free cooperation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In observance of this Solemnity there will be a Mass at St. Charles at 8:30 on Saturday morning.

Pray the rosary again this week for people estranged from the Church, that they may seek reconciliation through a good confession. Pray for those preparing to receive the sacraments of initiation at Easter. Pray for peace in the Ukraine and for all who are working to assist the refugees and victims of the war and recent earthquakes; and, as always, pray for peace.

May God bless his people with peace.
Monsignor Gorman