



Roman Catholic Diocese of East Anglia
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6 March 2024

PASTORAL LETTER

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT 2024 – LAETARE SUNDAY

The Latin Introit, or Entrance Antiphon, for this Fourth Sunday of Lent reads “Laetare, Jerusalem, et conventum facite, omnes qui diligitis eam;” – “Rejoice, Jerusalem, and all who love her.” The Holy City of Jerusalem is revered by all who trace the roots of their faith to the inheritance promised to the Patriarch Abraham. Across the many centuries since its foundation upon the hill of Moriah, the Holy City has experienced a seemingly endless cycle of fluctuating fortune. God would bring hope to his people by revealing his promises, bestow upon them many blessings and enable them to rejoice. However, due to their infidelities, the people would have to endure many disasters that brought despair and mourning. In our own time we are so conscious that Jerusalem and the Holy Lands are now flooded with the tears of so many. With great earnestness of spirit, we pray for an enduring peace that can only be built upon the secure principles of justice for all.

We might well ask ourselves, and others will ask us the question, how can we rejoice in the midst of a world that is seemingly captured by the darkness of despair? At Mass today we listen to an extract from the Second Book of Chronicles. This reading first describes how God’s People are ensnared by their own infidelity and become subjects to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, suffering the afflictions of Exile. Psalm 136 provides a depiction: “By the rivers of Babylon there we sat and wept, remembering Zion. ” However, the Book of Chronicles goes on to describe how God employed the actions of another foreign ruler, Cyrus the King of Persia, as an instrument of divine

providence. When Persia captured Babylon, Cyrus issues a decree to return God's People to their homeland: "Let them go up to Jerusalem and there build a Temple unto the Lord."

God's providence holds sovereignty across all ages, even in the darkest of days. In today's extract from the Gospel of John we listen to Jesus engaging with Nicodemus the Pharisee regarding how we are to be saved from the darkness of sin and death. Nicodemus, a Member of the Sanhedrin, whilst intrigued by what he has heard about Jesus, is as yet only prepared to meet this new Rabbi under cover of darkness. Jesus says that everybody who does wrong hates the light and avoids it, for fear his actions should be exposed. Our enlightenment will be like a second birth, says Jesus. But Nicodemus is confused, for how can we be born again. Jesus figuratively takes Nicodemus back to when God's People wandered the wilderness of Sinai when he says that "the Son of Man must be lifted up as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him." Jesus is guiding Nicodemus, and us, into the recognition that he is the Son of Man and not merely just another Rabbi. Jesus is guiding Nicodemus, and us, into the recognition that he is the Light of the World: "The man who lives by the truth comes out into the light, so that it may be plainly seen that what he does is done in God."

Our Lenten pilgrimage, if it is to be meaningful and fruitful, must be a genuine encounter with Jesus as the Christ, the Saviour, the Light of the World. The Letter to the Ephesians makes clear that it is not human effort or merit that bestows salvation but rather God's grace, a gift that is capricious and unearned. God's love does not follow the patterns of human logic for, despite the fact of our unworthiness, God shares with us the intimacy of his abiding love. God draws us out of darkness into the light. The gift is free, the invitation is open, but we must still choose to make the journey from the darkness into the light. If we experience separation from God it is not something he imposes on us but is rather what we impose on ourselves. The separation is caused by our own sin. To ignore or to resist the light is to choose the

darkness, a choice for which there is no excuse. Just as Nicodemus had to find the courage to come to Jesus in the daylight, so must we find the courage to choose the light. There is hope, for when we were dead through our sins, God brought us to life in Christ.

We can delight in listening to the words of the Letter to the Ephesians: “We are God’s work of art, created in Christ Jesus to live the good life as from the beginning he had meant us to live it.” As in generations past, God is calling us to abandon the domain of darkness where sin has dominion.

He who is the Light of the World is calling us today to accompany him to Jerusalem and beyond. Every day of Lent is a precious gift of opportunity. The call to conversion is universal and particular, communal and personal. When grace prompts us to take another step into the light there will be a blessing to behold in our own lives and it will bring encouragement to others to follow the same pathway. Let us live the good life as from the beginning God had meant us to live it. The human spirit is created for rejoicing, we are crafted in such a way that we can learn to sing the song of salvation even in the midst of the darkest hour. Let our voices ring out in concord with divine providence. Let us not only speak of peace but let become peacemakers. Let us not only speak of hope but let our lives become beacons of hope. Let us not only speak of Christ as the Light of the world but let us make his light manifest in the very conduct of our lives.

Let us prayerfully prepare for the mysteries of Sacred Triduum by reciting today’s great Antiphon:

Rejoice, Jerusalem, and all who love her. Amen.

Yours in Christ,



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