

4th (SJ&QA) Sunday of Lent Year B

Laetare! Rejoice! There's a reason for us to rejoice and be happy! "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life." In the worldly perspective this sounds crazy! "God so loved the world." A God of love has gotten involved with humanity despite all their sins and unworthiness? He even let His Son suffer and die for us all. If it is in the business world this is a losing venture with no prospect of Return on Investment, but God proceeded to get involved with us anyway. Crazy...? Yes, in the eyes of the world God's love is crazy. But in the heart of someone who loves, it is all there is and all that can be. St. Paul in his letter to the Ephesians echoes, "God, who is rich in mercy, because of the great love he had for us... brought us to life with Christ." For John, accepting salvation means coming to the light that has come into the world in Jesus. For Ephesians, it means being created in Christ as God's handiwork. Both assert that the work of salvation is God's initiative. But Ephesians indeed reveals, "By grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from you; it is the gift of God." Our first reading from the book of Chronicles tells us also that God's compassion motivates his saving work. Although Chronicles tells us the area of God's activity is history, not spirituality, the dynamics are the same; the wicked may have chosen darkness, but because God so loved the world the saving light prevailed. This too was the gift of God.

God does not simply love; *God so loved the world*. These two letters make a lot of difference. God gives his only Son: *so that we may be saved, that we may have life*. It is not enough to love, we have to love so much. We can love or like games, places, food, clothes, pets, and computers. But to *so love* will involve our whole self towards other selves, not things. To *so love* means to give our all and withhold nothing. *And why does God so love so much?* Not because God gets something from us or because we are so lovable. God loves because it is His nature to love. God cannot help but love. A Sunday school teacher asked her young students, “*Why do you love God?*” She received varied replies but one little boy’s answer stood out, “*I don’t know. I guess it just runs in our family.*” It is best when we love not because we have reasons to but because loving is the only reason and becomes natural for us since it is our nature to love. Jesus proved His love for us when he obediently accepted the cross. In his encyclical “*Deus Caritas Est*” God is love. Pope Benedict XVI reminds us that the Cross of Jesus is the supreme proof, the historical demonstration of this Love.

The lifting up of the Son of Man, Jesus, is the manifestation of the saving action of God. *The giving is total, unto dying on the cross*. God is the person of the Son as He suffers for the sake of humanity. The very holiness of God is manifested, not in “*power,*” but in the cross of Jesus. For the fullness of God’s perfection is his total love. But God has also given us the freedom, and respects that freedom, to accept or reject such

an offer of love. *Would you embrace His encompassing Love?* Human as we are, our loving is often not “crazy” enough. Often we tend to be conditional and calculating in our loving. However, God’s dealing with us is not based on our rejection of His love, you can only refuse, but you can never lose His love. *“Even when we were dead in our transgressions God brought us to life with Christ”* It is indeed only with a humble and humbled heart that we can accept God. But God’s grace helps us to love beyond our limits. We do not deserve God. Salvation is made possible by God’s grace. Believing in Jesus and putting his teachings into practice is accepting God’s love for us. This love eventually manifests itself in our relationships with one another.

The cross has always been a symbol of suffering and death. This image needs a makeover. We should see it as a symbol of *love, generosity, hope and courage*. The cross is the story of a man who believed it is possible to rise above the evil that man can do. It is the crossroads where man meets God when they do not give up on each other. It is the stairway to heavenly ideals and the key to God’s heart. *Have you died to your selfish desires?* Dying to oneself is difficult and painful. But the ensuing peace and joy certainly make the pain worthwhile. Do not just wear your cross. Lift up your hope. Raise your faith. Challenge yourself to inspire everyone you meet with the Christian life you live. We are now halfway in our Lenten observance and it is a time to review failing resolutions and to ask if our lives are

joyful responses to God's love. Lent is a call to step out of the ways of darkness into the light of Christ. May His redeeming love lead us out into freedom so that we will have the courage to proclaim the Good News to the world! Amen!