

Laetare: Sunday of Joy

“Mid-Lent”, of which you will not find any trace in the liturgical calendar, has now passed. It was last Sunday, March 03. However, the fourth Sunday of Lent which follows it is called the Sunday of Laetare, that is the Sunday of joy. Indeed, Laetare, in Latin, is the imperative of the verb “to rejoice”. The name comes from the text of today's antiphone: *Laetare Jerusalem! “Rejoice, Jerusalem, and gather together, all you who love her. Rejoice and be glad, you who were in sadness; then you will exult, you will be satisfied with comfort”* (Is 66: 10-11). Even the priest is dressed differently on this occasion. **His chasuble is pink**, which only happens twice a year: on Gaudete Sunday (mid-Advent) and on Laetare Sunday. The pink here is a combination of purple ornaments (those of penance) and white ornaments (those of the major feasts and holidays). The association of these two colors, however, reminds us that the joy is temporary and that Lent is not yet over. But back to joy.

Turn to Jesus Christ for eternal life (John 3:14-21)

Nicodemus was a Pharisee, a scholar who came to dialogue with Jesus. He will be secretly a disciple of Jesus, and we will find him in the Sanhedrin, where he will discreetly defend Jesus, and alongside Joseph of Arimathea, during the burial of Jesus. Nicodemus has a long and deep exchange with Jesus here, certain passages of which may escape the understanding of those who do not have his erudition... Thus, this story of the bronze serpent at the beginning of the Gospel passage!...

A little reminder from the book of numbers... (our 1st reading) ...

During their journey through the desert, the Hebrew people lose patience and criticize God and Moses. As punishment, God sent them snakes with deadly bites. The people then admit to having sinned and ask Moses to intercede for them.

God's response is a little surprising: he does not rule out the snakes, but he tells Moses to make a bronze snake and attach it to a pole. Those who are bitten by a snake must then look at the snake to stay alive. The symbolism of the snake, probably inherited from pagan customs, remains mysterious, but in any case, the message is clear: healing is offered to anyone who does trust in God while looking at the bronze serpent. Jesus takes this sign into account. By his crucifixion he will be lifted up, like the bronze serpent, and he will become a sign of eternal life to those who turn to him.

Thus, the cross, instrument of death, will become a sign of life and love for those who believe in Jesus Christ!

God loves us, and yet there is evil and suffering in the world. So, God's response to evil and suffering is his son Jesus Christ, who came into the world, who loved us to the point of giving his life on a cross, and who through his resurrection overcame death.

As with the Hebrew people in the desert, God calls us to trust, to turn to Jesus Christ for eternal life.

But turning to Jesus Christ is not a simple act of devotion! Our actions must be consistent!

If Jesus on the cross is the most striking sign of God's love, we must love him, bearing every difficulty, every suffering, making ourselves close to all those who suffer, to the sick, to those who are in distress, loneliness, the discouraged, those who are afraid, the desperate. Those who suffer are not always within the reach of our concrete action, but we can also carry them in our hearts, in our prayers.

Let us be witnesses of God's love. He can overcome all evil, but it is up to us to experience it among ourselves and to bring it to everyone!

On the occasion of mid-Lent: “Everyone will spontaneously offer to God, (in the joy coming from the Holy Spirit), some additional practices and will await the Holy Easter with the joy of spiritual desire”. Amen

SAINT:

Gregory the Great, Mar. 12. Only two Popes, Leo the First and Gregory the First, have been given the popular title of “the Great.” Both served in the difficult times of the barbarian invasions of Italy. Gregory also knew the horrors of “plague, pestilence, and famine.” He was born of a patrician family about 540, and became Prefect of Rome in 573. Shortly thereafter he retired to a monastic life in a community which he founded in his ancestral home on the Coelian Hill. Pope Pelagius the Second made him Ambassador to Constantinople in 579, where he learned much about the larger affairs of the Church. Not long after his return home, Pope Pelagius died of the plague, and in 590 Gregory was elected as his successor. Gregory's pontificate was one of strenuous activity. He organized the defense of Rome against the attacks of the Lombards, and

fed its populace from papal granaries in Sicily. In this as in other matters, he administered “the patrimony of St. Peter” with energy and efficiency. His ordering of the Church's liturgy and chant has molded the spirituality of the Western Church until the present day. Though unoriginal in theology, his writings provided succeeding generations with basic texts, especially the *Pastoral Care*, a classic on the work of the ministry. In the midst of all his cares and duties, Gregory prepared and fostered the evangelizing mission to the Anglo-Saxons under Augustine and other monks from his own monastery. The Venerable Bede justly called Gregory the Apostle of the English. Gregory died on March 12, 604, and was buried in St. Peter's basilica. His life was a true witness to the title he assumed for his office: “Servant of the servants of God.”