

Fourth Sunday of Lent

2 Chr 36:14-16, 19-23

Eph 2:4-10

Jn 3:14-21

The fourth Sunday of Lent is called *Laetare* or Rejoice Sunday, reminding us of the joy in anticipation of the resurrection of Christ. The readings of today stress God's mercy, compassion, love, and tenderness. In response to His love and as an expression of our faith, we are invited to share His suffering by doing penance in Lent. Great things happen in the world, not because we have committees but because of people with passion. God is passionate about each of us. Therefore, He sent His only Son to save us. That is what St. John tells us in the gospel, "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." God does not want anyone to be lost. He wants all to spend eternity with Him. We are His beloved sons and daughters. It is for that, that God let His only Son suffer and die—that we might live.

St. Paul in the second reading says that though we were dead to sin, God in His mercy and love brought us to life in Christ. God has shown us His infinite kindness in Jesus Christ. He does not give up on us. The "Hound of Heaven" written by Francis Thompson is one of the best religious poems in English. It is the story of a human soul who tries to flee from God. It is Thompson's own life story. He tried to flee from God and got himself into all kinds of evils. But he had no peace until he decided to return to God. God was after his soul and never gave up on him. God loves us so much that He pursues our soul to the end of the earth and beyond. Soon we will be celebrating the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ. Today's readings tell us that the reason for these events is God's love.

God's love is unconditional. He does not keep score of our wrongdoings. The first reading of today tells us how the infidelity and disobedience caused the people of Israel to lose their homeland. Yet God's mercy came to them through a pagan king, Cyrus who, inspired by the Lord, freed the Israelites and let them go back to their homeland. I have a T-shirt and on the back is written, "Spreading God's unconditional love." I used to wear this when I went to swim in Mavericks. One day, someone who saw me told me, "I think everything has a price. Nothing is free." Many have a problem with the concept of unconditional love, but God's love is unconditional. We who have experienced God's love need to share that love with others and love God in return. Loving God is the whole reason for our being. It was out of His love for us that He gave us His Body and Blood. We will soon receive His Body and Blood in the Eucharist. Let us pledge our love for Him and thank Him for His love.