

Laetare Sunday

Today (the fourth Sunday of lent) is called Laetare Sunday. Laetare is a Latin word for rejoice. In spite of the austere period of Lent, the church wants to rejoice today in anticipation of the paschal mystery which will soon be celebrated on Easter Sunday. The theme is taken from today's introit or entrance antiphon of Is. 66:20. *'Rejoice oh Jerusalem and come together all you that love her, rejoice with joy all you who mourn over her, that you may exult and be filled from the breast of your consolation.'*

Both Catholics, Lutherans, Anglicans and few other Protestants observe this day as Laetare Sunday. This Sunday is also known as Mothering Sunday because this day we are expected to visit our Mothers and express our love to them. Various customs developed on this Sunday, including the baking of "mother cakes." These cakes are also called "Simnel cakes," and sometimes the fourth Sunday of Lent is called *Simnel Sunday*. It is also called 'Rose Sunday', probably because of the we are allowed to put on Rose vestment in place violet.

I invite you to reflect with me on the topic:

WHOSOEVER BELIEVE IN HIM SHALL NOT PERISH BUT HAVE
ETERNAL LIFE

The word BELIEVE as recorded by St. John in today's gospel has been misconstrued by many preachers down the ages especially the so called protestant reformers who, as they did in many other passages of the scriptures, interpreted it to suit their teaching. For them, once you confesse

Jesus as your personal Lord and savior, you will automatically be saved. Luther went further to teach that our good work may not matter before God, all that is required is our faith in the Lord Jesus.

But belief here as taught by Christ goes deeper than a mere profession of faith. To believe means to trust and to trust implies having confidence in the one we trusted such confidence leads to love. Hence, Christ's statement: 'if anyone loves me, keep my commandments, and anyone who keeps my commandment will remain in my love just as I kept the Father's commandment and remained in His love (Jn. 15:10). This implies that there is no other way of demonstrating our trust and confidence in God than the keeping of His commandment, any other thing to the contrary, is hypocrisy, pretense or deceit.

It is only when faith or belief is properly understood as explained above that that John's statement (whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life) which forms our theme today will be meaningful. If belief is seen as something active in good work that we can say convincingly that our believing in the Lord Jesus can guarantee our eternal redemption. Belief of this nature presupposes holiness of life which is ever actively doing will of the one we believe in. eternal life cannot be such cheap as to be given to those who merely confesses believe in the Lord without good deeds. St. James holds that faith without good deed is dead (Jam. 2:14).

In the Old Testament, the Israelites lost confidence in God hence, they began to go against His commandments. God in His unfathomable love sent

prophets after prophets to warn them of the impending dangers which would as a result of their non-compliance with his commandment, but rather than repenting, they made mockery of the message and ill-treated both the prophets and their messages. God was then forced to hand them over to their enemies, the Babylonians who butchered them like animals, and took the few survivors captive to the foreign land where they were reduced to serfdom. That was not all, God allowed His place of worship and the sacred vessels to be desecrated and demolished by the gentiles, just as He, because of the irresponsible behavior of Eli, allowed the Israelites to be conquered, and the Ark of Covenant to be carried away by the gentiles (1Sam. 4:1ff). Our irresponsible behavior could lead to disasters, lack of success in our various undertakings in life and other forms of hardship that we are going through today.

There is a proverbial saying that if a dog is destined to die, its nostril is blocked from perceiving any odor. Again, flies that ignore counsel follow a corpse to the grave. The fowl that is hard of hearing hears in the pot of soup. A toad was once warned about a passing lorry that it should clear from the road to avoid being crushed, but instead of clearing from the road, the toad blew himself up and asked its informant if that lorry was as big as its blown self, the informant told him that the lorry was much bigger than himself, he increased his size to its elasticity limit and said, I'm such it cannot be as big as I'm now. He was still saying that when it was run over by the moving lorry. All these proverbs suit the actions of the Israelites in today's first reading. Pride they said goes before the fall. The Israelites had the opportunity to repent and call

on the name of the Lord who would have forgiven them but they were too arrogant and preferred to persecute the messengers of God probably, so as to enjoy the freedom of doing what they wanted. But the truth is that true freedom is only found in God.

The temptation here will be to rush into rash and hasty judgment but we should not forget that we also do the same thing in daily activities. Every now and then we find ourselves heaping sin upon sin but God in His mercy keep calling us back through His ministers and we keep ignoring and scorning such messages as we try to gratify our insatiable flesh. What is that sin that has hold you hostage: fornication, marital infidelity, pornography, masturbation, stealing, examination fraud, drug addiction, drunkenness, gossip, un-forgivingness, disrespectfulness etc. that is the part of you where Jesus is interested. He wants to heal you so that you will be completely made whole.

We may have fallen, but there is absolutely no need to be discouraged or despaired, God is very rich in mercy because of the great love He has for us, even when we were dead in sin, He brought us life with Christ (Eph. 2:4). Once we come back to Him, repentant, tearing not our garments but our hearts, He will definitely forgive all our trespasses and cleanse of our iniquities.