

JMJ CHS

Laetare Sunday March 27, 2022

When do you suppose salvation history began? I would say it began in the garden of Eden after the fall. God promises a redeemer. And so it began. Some years later, mankind had descended so far into sin that God almost brought it to an end with the great flood. But Noah and his family were saved and continued the journey through salvation history. We were given a second chance. And then there was Abraham. God introduced himself to him and made some great promises. He would be the father of many nations, would make a covenant with him and give a home to his many descendants – the so-called *Promised Land*. A land flowing with milk and honey. Last week we read about Moses and *the burning bush*. That marked the beginning of an important journey which was kind of a microcosm of salvation history. A journey from bondage into freedom. Their journey lasted for 40 years and is mirrored in our journey of 40 days in lent.

Now, today's first reading marks the end of that short phase of salvation history. It's the end of their wandering in the desert and Joshua finally leads the Israelites into that land promised to Abraham many years earlier. The Levite priests carry the Ark of the Covenant across the Jordan into their new home. The heavenly manna that looked like frost on the ground, was the food for their journey. It now comes to an end. Now they will be able to eat the fruit of the land. But they saved a single bowl full of that manna and put it in the Ark along with Aaron's staff and the two tablets of the law. That Ark has been lost for many years now, and there's been a lot of theories about where it might be. But there is a hint in the Second book of Maccabees, chapter 2, where it reports that Jeremiah the prophet, at the time of the exile, hid it for safekeeping, in a cave on the side of a mountain overlooking the promised land. And it has been said that its location would remain hidden until such time that God chooses to reveal it. Wouldn't it be neat if the Ark of the Covenant was discovered in our time? That could be a big moment in salvation history. But, would the manna still be there? I have often wondered if it will look like a bowl of communion hosts?

In the universal Catholic Church, we recently celebrated the *Solemnity of the Annunciation*. It is from the word "announce", when the angel Gabriel made a proposal to a young woman in an obscure town in Palestine near the sea of Galilee. Will you, Mary, agree to be a part of salvation history? She gives her famous 'Fiat', her 'yes'! "*Be it done unto me according to thy word.*" And so it continued. We now have the Incarnation. God takes on flesh. Spirit becomes matter. The enfleshment of God, in his son, who was named Jesus. That long-awaited Messiah first promised in the Garden of Eden, is now to be born of Mary. And this is undoubtedly a very, very important moment in salvation history. The stage is now set for the centerpiece.

As part of our solemnity Mass, in communion with Pope Francis, our Bishop Earl Boyea and Catholic bishops and the faithful all around the world, we consecrated Russia and Ukraine, to the *Immaculate Heart of Mary*. This action was requested by the Catholic Bishops of Ukraine as a means of hopefully restoring peace in their war-ravaged country. This consecration is associated with the apparition of the Blessed Mother to the children of Fatima and we brought the statues of those children out of storage for that consecration. The Lady of Fatima spoke to the children about one of the secrets of Fatima, that for peace in the world, Russia must be consecrated to her Immaculate Heart. There has been some debate as to whether that has already been done by Pope John Paul II some years back – it did seem fruitful. The Soviet Union collapsed, the Berlin Wall came down, and there was that period of "glasnost". But, we did it again, and we hope that it, too, will bear much fruit and restore harmony to Eastern Europe and preserve peace in the world.

Next, I would like to say a few words about what is probably the most famous of Jesus' parables, the parable of the *Prodigal Son*. You have already heard it preached on many times and from many different angles and perspectives. The father in the story, of course, represents God the Father and his wayward son probably represents all of us, at least at some point in our lives. For some of us, like the boy in the story, we have found our way back; but others have not. And then some of us are like that older son, filled with resentment at the father's welcome back of his hairball younger brother.

Well, today, at this point in salvation history, we have a lot of prodigal children out there. Young and old, male and female. They have wandered away from their father's house. But the Father, of course, wants them back. And in His mercy He will do whatever He can to accomplish that goal. He is willing to actually run down the driveway to welcome them back home.

So, moms and dads, brothers and sisters, take an example from the father in the story and be hopeful and patient, merciful and forgiving with your wayward children. Perhaps, by the grace of God, they will find their way back home to you.

Lastly, let me say a little bit about *Laetare Sunday*. Laetare means 'Rejoice' and it was announced in today's opening antiphon. from Isaiah which said:

*"Rejoice, Jerusalem, and all who love her.  
Be joyful, all who were in mourning;  
exult and be satisfied at her consoling breast."*

Earlier in the week at one of the Masses I preached on the reading which spoke about forgiving 70 times 7. I said that was one of the two most difficult things Christians are called upon to do. 'Like, what if I don't feel like forgiving? What if my wound is too deep?' The other potentially difficult thing to do is to rejoice. But again, what if I don't feel like rejoicing. Well, there will always be suffering and all kinds of broken hearts, but over the past few years, very few people have felt like rejoicing. People are dismayed and fearful about what is going on. And here, in the midst of a war that could become a bigger war, how can we be called upon to rejoice? And yet we are exhorted to rejoice. It was St. Paul who said it best, "Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice." No asterisks. Nothing in parentheses. No loopholes. No caveats. At another place in scripture, the prophet Ezra admonishes his weeping congregation, saying that this is the Sabbath and rejoicing in the Lord must be your strength,

So rejoicing, as I see it, must be..... an act of the will. You must choose to rejoice, even at this time, because as Jesus said it himself, "I have overcome the world." So, if that is the case, it stands to reason that there is, indeed, *cause for rejoicing here*, even in the midst of the storm.

We now continue on our Lenten journey to Calvary and the centerpoint of Salvation History. The Crucifixion. The atoning sacrifice of that redeemer who was promised in the garden. We called a terrible day, Good Friday. And we say these words at the Easter Vigil: "*Oh happy fault, O necessary sin of Adam, which gained for us so great a Redeemer.*"

OK, let's close with this final encouragement. It is a passage from the Pope; the first one, Saint Peter, in his first letter to us. This is what he said: "*By the power of God, you are guarded, through faith, for salvation, which is ready to be revealed..... in the last days. And over this you rejoice; though now, for a little while, if need be, you are made sorrowful by various trials, so that the temper of your faith, more precious by far than gold, which is tried by fire, may be found unto praise and glory and honor, at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*"

Fr. John