

# Fourth weekend of Lent 2021

A Reflection on the scriptures by Fr Sylvester O'Flynn OFM Cap., Rochestown, Cork

## Rejoice in the Lord

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

The Entrance Antiphon for today's Mass is the perfect antidote to any darkness or frustration one might be feeling as the lockdown continues. The Fourth Sunday of Lent is a Laetare Sunday, Rejoicing Sunday, as the readings invite us to rejoice as we reflect on God's love and mercy. In our weekly reflection I usually concentrate on the Gospel of the day, but today I will take the three Readings as each one speaks of the joyful experience of God's love.

### **The end of the exile**

The Old Testament Reading (2 Chronicles 36:14-23) is the astounding message to the exiles in Babylon that the new king, Cyrus, has announced that the Jews may return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. For seventy years, by the rivers of Babylon, they hung up their harps for how could they sing the song of the Lord on alien soil. Overnight the scenario changed. When God's moment comes, a thousand years is like a single day. Let us bravely cooperate with the frustrating restrictions and pray in hope that our pandemic exile will soon end.

### **God's work of art**

The Second Reading, from Paul's Letter to the Ephesians 2:4-10, continues the saving power of God's love. "God loved us with so much love that he was generous with his mercy: when we were dead through our sins, he brought us to life with Christ." Then Paul continues with one of my favourite lines in the bible: "We are God's work of art, created in Christ Jesus to live the good life as from the beginning he had meant it to be." Various philosophers have given us their take on the meaning of life but I doubt if anyone has surpassed Paul's answer that we are God's work of art.

Years ago, somebody gave me a very simple but beautiful black and white poster. It showed a little boy, maybe four years old, looking out at you, very serious and very happy.

Underneath was his message. "I know that I am somebody, 'cos God don't make no junk." He must have heard Paul's message about being God's work of art. Of course, any work of art can be spoiled or even destroyed, which leads us to the Gospel of the day (John 3:14-21).

### **Jesus and Nicodemus**

Jesus has been speaking with Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews, who came to him by night. Jesus explains that he is offering a whole new form of life, a spiritual rebirth, if we allow ourselves to be lifted up to the values that he called the kingdom of God, a kingdom of life and light, of truth and peace, of mercy and love.



He recalled the strange story of Moses lifting up the serpent in the desert. People had been poisoned by snakebites. Moses told the people to fashion a bronze serpent and to look up at it. As snakes shuffle off their exterior shell to expose a brand new one, the snake was revered as a symbol of new life. Until recent

times, a snake curled around a drinking vessel was the sign outside a pharmacy. Jesus would be lifted up on the cross and in his resurrection, shuffling off what Shakespeare called this mortal coil to reveal his resurrection.

### **God loved the world**

The Gospel then gives us this beautiful thought. “For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost but may have eternal life. For God sent his Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but so that through him the world might be saved.”

Does this mean that nobody will ever be condemned, that there is no hell? We can be sure that the merciful God will do His part. “No one who believes in him will be condemned.”

However, we must do our part by following the light of Jesus. “Whoever refuses to believe is condemned already because he has refused to believe in the name of God’s only Son.”

God will not condemn anybody but people condemn themselves by refusing to follow the way of light. “Though the light has come into the world, people have shown they prefer darkness to light because their deeds were evil. Indeed, everyone who does wrong hates the light and avoids it for fear his actions should be exposed.” People who live evil lives hate the light of goodness.

That’s enough of the bad news. Let us concentrate more on what Pope Francis calls the joy of the gospel. It is a good idea to have a little notebook for your favourite quotations.

Today’s readings are full of light and hope. “You are God’s work of art”. “God don’t make no junk.” “God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son ... not to condemn the world but so that through him the world might be saved.”

### **Prayer**

O God of love and mercy, we raise our minds and hearts to you in this difficult exile of fear and frustration. You once healed people from an epidemic by looking at a bronze serpent. Today, we raise our minds and hearts to Jesus lifted up in his suffering on the cross and in the new life of his resurrection. On this Sunday of joy, may we truly be God’s work of art, created anew in Christ Jesus to live the good life as from the beginning he had meant us to live it.