

Fourth Sunday of Lent
Laetare Sunday
March 19, 2023
Year of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Ark of the New Covenant

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let all men know your forbearance. The Lord is at hand. Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:4-7)

In his Letter to the Philippians, Saint Paul stressed the need to “Rejoice, in the Lord” (Philippians 4:4). The living out of this message to “Rejoice,” has not lessened since the day it was first proclaimed. Rather, I would offer, it is we who have changed our perception of what it means to “Rejoice, in the Lord.” This change consists in our preaching of and believing in a Gospel which focuses on ourselves instead of God.

As the celebration of Easter approaches, I would like us to remember that this moment, our Mass, is not about our emotions or our well-being. At first glance, this would seem to fly in the face of what we experience when we attend a Mass. In an attempt to have a more “active participation” by you, the lay faithful, we have, as some theologians would attest, managed to shift our focus. The shift, to which these theologians point, is seen in the years of liturgical experimentation and the obstinance of some who taught ideas and theories contrary to the Deposit of the Faith. We have tried so many things, pushed so many trends, espoused so many proposed solutions, and we still hear people say: “If only we go a little further, then we will finally see the fruit of our labor.” Even with everything we have done, we still see an increase of “fallen away Catholics” who flatly state they no longer “actively participate” because they do not “get” anything out of Catholicism, most especially out of our Mass. Dear friends, when we began to adopt the attitude of needing to “get” something out of our Faith, out of the Mass, then we lost our focus on why our hearts should “Rejoice.”

With this said, may I then inquire as to the reason or reasons why you are here today? I know why I am here; it is my vocation to be here. But, why are you here? Allow me to answer that question for you with your own words taken from every Mass—It is Right and Just. You are here today, at this moment, in this Mass, to Rejoice in the Lord because it is Right and Just.

Before we come together to join our sacrifices with His Sacrifice of the Mass, we pray together a Eucharistic Preface. Within that Preface, I encourage you to “lift up your hearts.” You respond, “We lift them up to the Lord.” I follow by asking you to “give thanks to the Lord our God.” In other words, I ask you to Rejoice in the Lord. And, what do you say to this request — It is Right and Just. I conclude this dialogue with these words: “It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give You thanks.” We are all of us, here today because it is right and just to rejoice, giving thanks to our God.

My family we are not here offering thanks to God solely for the purpose of “getting” something from Him. We are here, rather, because we owe Him our deepest gratitude for everything. However, because God is such a generous Father, He cannot help Himself and He gives to those who, being in a state of grace, are able to receive more of His grace. He greatly desires to fill our souls with Himself to the point of overflowing. He wants us to honor Him by the way we live our lives, remaining strong in His Presence. All of this is mystically available to you at this time. Sure, it is not the wealth promised by some television preacher. It is of so much more value. It is Him, the grace of His Presence, that we are invited to receive today. May He find us ready, with open hearts and minds, able to receive fully that grace He so ardently desires to fill our soul.