

## **LENT 4      YEAR B**

### **Laetare Sunday**

#### **Numbers 21:4-9**

From Mount Hor the Israelites set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; but the people became impatient on the way. The people spoke against God and against Moses, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food.” Then the Lord sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. The people came to Moses and said, “We have sinned by speaking against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord to take away the serpents from us.” So Moses prayed for the people. And the Lord said to Moses, “Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live.” So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.

#### **The Epistle Ephesians 2:1-10**

You were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ-- by grace you have been saved-- and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God-- not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

#### **The Gospel John 3:14-21**

Jesus said, “Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”

## **Prayer:**

Heavenly Father, in these days of change we ask that your Holy Spirit rest easy with us, so that our hearts may rejoice and we awake each day with Hallelujah in our hearts! **AMEN**

## **Homily:**

In the Middle Ages Lent was a very big deal.

They began serious fasting on Ash Wednesday.

Even though most people were already hungry,  
most of the time

On a typical day you'd normally hope for at least one small meal.<sup>i</sup>

If food was available, you might find

Warm fresh milk, yogurt and cheese.<sup>ii</sup>

Hard-boiled eggs were probably common.

And maybe a boiled chicken, if she didn't lay eggs.

Might find some veggies,

if they didn't have a Texas Spring like we just had.

Apples maybe. But just about no fruit.

We would call that extreme.

600 years ago, they'd call it everyday life!

Today is Laetare Sunday. "Laetare" is Latin for Rejoice.

600 years ago, folks needed a break. And Laetare Sunday was it.  
We are halfway through Lent. In life halfway really matters.

- What Mom can't remember being halfway through pregnancy?
- Who hasn't looked at a highway sign and sighed with relief,  
*Halfway home. At last.*

We usually rejoice when we are halfway through a tough time,  
But halfway to the Promised Land,  
The Israelites<sup>iii</sup> weren't rejoicing.  
They grumbled and complained.

"Why'd you bring us out of Egypt to die in the wilderness?  
At least as Pharaoh's slaves, we had food and water."  
A bunch of ingrate whiners.

To God it must have sounded something like this:

"Sure, you saved us from slavery in Egypt.  
And Yes, You led us across the Red Sea,  
And saved us from Pharaoh's army."

*But what have you done for us lately?*

But, let's be real. The Israelites were still a small weak tribe.  
They had no idea what the Promised Land really was,  
Plus they were hungry and homeless.<sup>iv</sup>

To get the Promised Land they had to cut through a high plain ...<sup>v</sup>

Loose sand, gravel, sharp granite shards.

Low shrubs, dry river beds. Little food or water.

For entertainment ... probably a sandstorm or two.

NO WONDER they were whining.

The price of entry to the Promised Land was pretty steep!

...

### **Three men show up at the gates of heaven.**

They lived good lives.

They pretty comfortable about meeting their Maker.

Saint Peter says:

"Heaven has a new policy. *You have to pass a spelling test.*"

The 1<sup>st</sup> man says: "OK. I love the Lord.

If that's what he wants, that's what I'll give."

"Spell the word GOD", St. Peter says. "G O D" replied the man.

The gate opens wide, and the man goes right in.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> man stepped forward. But he looked kind of worried.

St. Peter says, "Are you ready?"

"Yes, I am", the second man says,

"But, please don't be too hard on me.

I showed a lot of wild oats, when I was young.

Plus I can't spell."

"Me too", says St. Peter.

"Spell GOD". "G O D", replied the man.

And, the gate opens wide. In goes the 2<sup>nd</sup> man.

*Finally*, it's the 3<sup>rd</sup> man's turn. He's pretty ticked off about the delay.

He says to Peter,

"This rule change is ridiculous.

Whoever made it up is an idiot."

"Everyone knows I worked hard all my life.

I made a lot of money.

I went to church every Sunday. I was a big Tither.

Just two days ago I paid for the new roof on the parish hall."

As soon as I get in, I'm going to register a complaint."

St. Peter had mellowed out after 2,000 years.

He said, with a patient sigh,

"I know. I totally get it and I'm sorry".

"But the rules are the rules."

“Are you ready to spell your word?”

"Of course I am" the man says.

After a brief pause, St. Peter drew a deep breath and said,

.... "*spell Czechoslovakia*"

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Life can be tough. We all get upset sometimes

We all just went through heck.

But this 4th Sunday is about unwinding a bit.

It's about rejoicing.

Because God hears our cries and God answers them.

God heals us with laughter.

Lent is about letting GOD turn us around... laughter is life!

This is a day to celebrate our Salvation, our Freedom and our love.

In this crazy world things seem upside down.

What goes around comes around.

What has been will be again,

what has been done will be done again;

there is nothing new under the sun.<sup>vi</sup>

We all know that things are a bit topsy turvey.

But then they always have been.

Sometimes, God keeps us in the dark.

But still, God says, *Rejoice*.

There was a time you let me know  
What's really going on below  
But now you never show it to me, do you?  
And remember when I moved in you  
The holy dove was moving too  
And every breath we drew was Hallelujah.<sup>vii</sup>

...

Sometimes God keeps us, in the dark.  
Which is kind of irritating.

But when we serve the Lord,  
*every breath is Hallelujah!*

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,  
that everyone who believes in him may not perish,  
but may have eternal life.”

Hallelujah!

God has created us for good works, and the  
Holy Spirit has revealed the good works we are called to do.  
And every breath we drew was Hallelujah

....

And every breath we draw is Hallelujah!

**AMEN**

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<sup>i</sup> Except for the very young, the elderly or the sick, who came first.

<sup>ii</sup> But meat was rare, because you don't want to eat the old girl who gives you that milk.

<sup>iii</sup> In today's Old Testament reading.

<sup>iv</sup> And when they wanted to take a shortcut the Edomites said, NO. That kind of matters. There's some important Bible history you've got to know. It goes back to Jacob and Esau, the sons of Isaac and Rebekah. Esau was born before Jacob, who came out grasping his older brother's heel, as if he was trying to pull Esau back into the womb so that Jacob could be firstborn. In fact, "Jacob" means "he who grasps the heel", a Hebrew idiom for deceptive behavior. See, Gen 25:26 NIV fn. a. The word Edom means "red", and Esau, rightful claimant to Isaac's birthright, was a red head;

<sup>v</sup> Esau was Isaac's first born son. He had red hair (i.e. "edom"). Jacob was a trickster and Esau wasn't too bright. Too impulsive. So, one day when Esau came in from the fields, starving after a hard day's work, Jacob cleverly offered to give red headed Esau a bowl of red stew in exchange for the right to be recognized as the firstborn son. Esau impulsively and unwisely agreed. As such he traded his birthright to Jacob, the trickster.

Jacob grew up, got a good wife and made a lot of money. Plus God changes his name to Israel. George Washington and Abe Lincoln rolled into one! Esau, didn't do so well. Too impulsive. His descendant's, the Edomites (aka The Reds) and Jacob's descendant's (the Israelites) didn't get along. What goes around, comes around, the Edomites must have said

<sup>vi</sup> Ecclesiastes 1:9 (NIV)

<sup>vii</sup> Leonard Cohen, Hallelujah (1984)