

Homily for the 4th Sunday in Lent

March 10-11, 2018

Readings: 2 Chronicles 36:14-16,19-23; Ephesians 2: 4-10; John 3: 14-21

Preacher: Sr. Karen Dietz

The scripture readings this weekend remind me of the joke about a flood, a boat and a helicopter (<http://epistle.us/inspiration/godwillsaveme.html>) If you are not familiar, follow the link. Essentially the drowning man refused all the “helps” or signs God was sending while at the same time looking for something more. God was coming to the man in ways that seemed too ordinary; the man felt that if he gave in to any of these, he was not a man of faith.

In Chronicles we read:

Early and often did the LORD, the God of their ancestors send his messengers to them, for he had compassion on his people. But they mocked the messengers of God.

This weekend we celebrate Laetare Sunday, “Rejoice” Sunday—this season of fasting, prayer and almsgiving is half over. We are half-way to the celebration of Jesus’ passion, death and resurrection and the Church reminds us to rejoice. I believe noticing the presence of God or paying attention to God’s messengers is the primary source of joy. Even when we are in the midst of suffering or struggle, when we pick up our heads and look around and are drawn to a sound, sight or even a smell that helps us recall the Creator, we touch deep into our souls and find joy.

This Sunday is the centerpiece of the Lenten season as we make the most difficult journey to the cross. The rejoicing of this season is born of experiencing life in all its ups and downs. It is a deep sense of being grounded in God’s extravagant love flows through us like an underground river; a source of joy that is vital, nourishing the body, mind and spirit from within.

The letter to the Ephesians helps us understand this gift of joy and how as Christians we are called to accept and make use of it:

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from you; it is the gift of God; it is not from works, so no one may boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for the good works that God has prepared in advance, that we should live in them.

We are being told that all has been given to us by God, through no work on our part. In return, we are asked to live with all the beauty and dignity befitting God's handiwork. As we read this excerpt, we are reminded that we are all equal in God's eyes; the life we lead and the work we do is solely a reflection of God's presence in the world and not a measuring instrument pitting one against another. God's grace is freely given and cannot be earned by our actions or words.

Living this deep and abiding joy has more substance than simply delighting in God's presence. As I pray these readings and reflect on the world in which we live, I am aware that it is so much more.

To be a disciple in our world today requires us to honestly search out the presence of God in one another and in creation while at the same time honoring all creation as loved by that same God. We are challenged to set aside any prejudice, to welcome the presence of God in the other with joy and love. In a world that is full of civil wars, rampant racism, sexual predation, poverty and political posturing, God desires only that we love. This calls us to set aside our individual egos for the sake of the common good.

Most of us fear losing ourselves as we give ourselves over more completely to God. The more deeply we fall in love with God, the more aware we become that in giving of ourselves, we become filled with the vital presence of God—full of grace. My prayer for us is that with each Lenten season, we fall more deeply in love with God and God's creation, becoming closer to the "handiwork" we are called to be. Today's Gospel encourages us in this:

But whoever lives the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be clearly seen as done in God.

Let us pray for one another and for our world. May we breathe deeply God's truth so that we might more deeply live in God's light. May this light of love cast out the darkness of fear and division, bringing us closer to God's kingdom here and now.