

## Fourth Sunday of Lent C - Rejoice and be Christ's Ambassadors

March 27, 2022.

This Sunday is "**Laetare Sunday**" [(lay-TAH-ray), the Sunday in which the entrance antiphon of the liturgy begins with the word "laetare" which means "rejoice" "**Rejoice, Jerusalem, and all who love her.**" **Midway through our Lenten journey towards Christ's Passion and Resurrection, the Church invites us to rejoice.** In the first reading (Joshua 5:9a, 10-12), there's great rejoicing as the Israelites celebrate their first Passover in the Promised Land, a significant milestone. In the second reading (2 Corinthians 5:17-21), St. Paul tells us we're a new creation if we're in Christ who is made sin by God so that we might become the righteousness of God. In Luke's famous story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:1-3, 11-32), we can see ourselves as the two brothers who are profoundly loved by the father, Our Father in heaven, who is waiting anxiously for us to come back to Him. Christian joy is a unique joy. It doesn't go away like earthly joys that come and go. **Friendship with Christ never wears out. God's goodness, creativity, and love are infinite.** So if we really know him, if we are actively living that friendship, we can never get tired of him, our joy can never wear out.

Unfortunately, we sometimes let life's hustle and bustle drown out that friendship. When that happens, we stop experiencing Christian joy. One way to keep this joy fresh is to spread it, to fulfill our primary mission as Christians. St Paul describes that mission in one short phrase "**We are ambassadors for Christ.**" **God has sent us out into the world** the way leaders of countries send out ambassadors to other countries - **to be his representatives, his messengers. Christ has given each of us the power to speak in his name: to announce the "good news of great joy"** to all the prodigal sons around us, at the office, at school, on our streets telling them the Father is waiting with open arms, that God's forgiveness is real, that life can have meaning. And when we tell others about it, it is fresh in our own minds too.

I recently read an article about a young man and a young woman who experienced this powerfully in a winter day in 2007. Jim and Janice were youth group members at a parish. They were chosen to deliver the prize (a food basket) to the winner of the Parish Rosary Society's fundraising raffle. They called the phone number eleven times. No answer. The raffle organizer suggested making another draw. But Janice wanted to keep trying. She and Jim decided to drive the food basket to the address which led them through the snowy streets to a run-down apartment building in the poorest side of the city. They climbed the stairs and knocked on the door. No answer. They knocked again. Still no answer. They waited, knocked again and waited. Finally, they left and started to drive away, but a strange feeling came over Jim who turned the car around. "**We're gonna try one more time,**" he said. This time, their knock was answered by a young woman holding a tiny baby. She opened the door and invited them into the shabby apartment. They sat down on the worn-out sofa. As Jim explained the raffle, congratulated her and presented her with the food basket, Janice looked around and her eyes wandered over to the little kitchenette. She saw that there was a glass of water on the counter and besides it, a medicine bottle with the lid opened. Just then Jim finished his congratulations speech. Suddenly, the young woman held her baby very close, and burst out crying. She pressed her head to her baby's and mumbled through the sobs, "My husband left me and I was going to kill myself, then I heard the second knocking on the door," she said, "I thought nobody cared." Jim and Janice, Christ's ambassadors, had showed her that God cared. **They had fulfilled their mission of sharing their own Christian joy.**

On CTV News a month ago, I read that the President of North Macedonia (once part of Yugoslavia, it is a small landlocked country in southeastern Europe with a population of around 2 million) walked an 11-year-old girl with Down syndrome to school after he heard she was being bullied. President Stevo Pendarovski is seen holding Embla Ademi's hand as he walked her to her

elementary school in the city of Gostivar. He is also seen waving the 11-year-old off at the school gate as she walks into the building. Embla has experienced bullying at school because of having Down syndrome. President Pendarovski talked to Embla's parents about the challenges she and her family face on a daily basis, and discussed solutions. **"The behaviour of those who endanger children's rights is unacceptable, especially when it comes to children with atypical development. They should not only enjoy the rights they deserve, but also feel equal and welcomed at the school desks and in the schoolyard. It is our obligation, as a state, but also as individuals, and the key element in this common mission is empathy. It will help children like Embla, but it will also help us learn from them how to sincerely rejoice, share and be in solidarity. We are all equal in this society. I came here to give my support and to raise awareness that inclusion is a basic principle"**, the press release quoted Pendarovski as saying. The President also said he **"encourage and support Embla's parents in their fight for the protection of the rights of children like their daughter. Prejudices in that context are the main obstacle to building an equal and just society for all."** He stressed there was **"a legal and moral obligation to provide inclusive education, in which the main focus is on developing skills and abilities in children with different developmental processes"**. What a Christ's ambassador of joy!

**We are all Christ's ambassadors. We all have received the mission to share Christ and spread our Christian joy.** Like Jim and Janice, we have to knock on doors one more time. In a sense, we are called to be God's goodness for others. In us, through our words, actions, and example, God wants all people to discover how much he loves, so that they can enter into friendship with him and experience Christian joy. This week, **we should renew our commitment to fulfill this mission - to be Christ's ambassadors - consciously, actively.** One specific way to do this is to go on a peace-making mission this week. Not by sending a letter to the United Nations to stop Russian invasion in Ukraine, but by being Christ-like with the people around us, by looking for opportunities to reconcile people who are in conflict. It may mean taking the first step and apologizing to someone who is in conflict with us... It may mean revitalizing a relationship that has been neglected... It may mean acting as a mediator between friends, colleagues, or even family members...When we live in willful conflict with our neighbours, we are not friends with Christ. And **without a healthy friendship with Christ, Christian joy is definitely impossible.**

Brothers and sisters in Christ, as Christ's ambassadors, the ministry of being a peacemaker, the ministry of reconciliation, belongs to all of us. Just as in the gospel story, God is showing us his generosity of forgiveness and love. No matter how great our sins are and how many times we have offended Him, he is always ready and willing to welcome us back with open arms. If we want to be true ambassadors of Christ, we must do the same. Maybe you have already thought of a peacemaking mission that God wants you to undertake. Or maybe it will be enough to ask God to give you a chance this week, and promise to stay tuned to his inspirations. Imagine how different the world would be in one week if each of us were to make and fulfill this commitment. There would be a million times more joy in the world next Sunday than there is today! In today's Mass, let's thank God for the gift of Christian joy, and let's ask for the courage to spread the good news, to walk with a child or adult with disability, to knock on our neighbour's door just one more time. Amen.