

Homily for 4th Sunday of Lent

This Sunday is set aside for us to recall God's graciousness and to rejoice because of it. We have every reason to rejoice. Hence, each of the three readings characterizes one of the many facets of Easter joy. In the first reading, the Chosen People of God are portrayed as celebrating, for the first time in their own land, the feast of their freedom. Their joy is one of promises fulfilled. In today's Responsorial Psalm the joyful Psalmist invites us, "Glorify the Lord with me; let us together extol His Name!" then gives us our reason for rejoicing, I sought the Lord, and He answered me, and delivered me from all my fears! The second reading joyfully proclaims the effect of Jesus' saving act as the reconciliation of all peoples to the Father. In the Gospel, the joy is that of a young son's "coming home," where he discovers and is healed by the reality his father's forgiving and gratuitous love. Real Joy comes through reconciliation and through it friendship with God! A relationship that never ends, and something no one can take away from us. This is the source of a Christian's joy. *Some time ago, a father was asked by his third son, 19 years old, for a loan of his car to go to a nearby town with his friends for a disco. He promised his father that he would drive very carefully and wouldn't drink. In the past he had sometimes come home drunk. However, this time he was true to his word regarding the drink but the car, a Mercedes, was very powerful and he wanted to show off to the friends and drove at speed whilst they cheered him on. Suddenly the car went out of control. Luckily, none of them was seriously injured but the car was totally destroyed. On his way home in a taxi he was scared to meet his father as he expected the worst, especially as his mother and siblings had warned the father not to give him the car. To his amazement the father threw his arms around him and hugged him warmly, telling him whilst they could never replace him they could always replace the car.*

The awareness that we can never be replaced will help us live our life happily. Pope Francis said: Christians must be strong and let go of all the bitterness and negativity that prevent them from experiencing God's consolation and joy. There are two things that prevent people from letting themselves find solace with God: Resentment and complaints. Shakespeare claims : "The Earth has music for those who listen." I say, "The beating of our hearts, accompanied by the rhythm of our lungs.. ..if we listen.. .. sings: 'Joy. The Pharisees complained of Jesus: "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." The parable was Jesus' answer to them. It is a challenge to those whose lives are marked by complaint and discontent. We know of the elder brother's bitterness and resentment and his lack of joy. Not only do we have to do with the return of the younger son, the prodigal. We have to do with the bitter son, the elder. The resentful one. The more we gaze upon the elder, the more we see ourselves. It is interesting to contrast the lines uttered by the two sons to their father, who went out to meet them, in the gospel of today. The prodigal son opens his lines with the word, "Father!" But the dutiful son says, "Look!" The younger feels he is not worthy to be a son , but the other has always been a slave, and wants to be so. This was the spirit in which he was working for his father. He was slaving. There was no thankfulness. There was no joy. No love. Just slaving. A son who lived his life in service to his father, not because of love, but because of duty.

The preacher was shaking hands with the members of his congregation after a service when one man approached him and said, "That was a wonderful sermon today, pastor!" Filled with Christian modesty, the preacher replied, "Oh, it wasn't me, it was God." To which the reply came, "It wasn't that good." We are masters" when it comes to the negative, and impoverished "beggars" when it comes to the positive. What we feed grows, so if the negative is fed, it will grow; but if the positive is fed, it will grow and become an important basis of stable joy in our life. When people choose to be resentful and bitter, we stew our feelings in that broth of bitterness, preferring to be left alone to sulk undisturbed and defeated. Instead, God asks people to be strong, get up and trust in him. People need to ask themselves, "How is my heart? Do I harbour some bitterness there? Some sadness?" . And what is on one's lips, Is it praise to God, beauty or always complaints?"