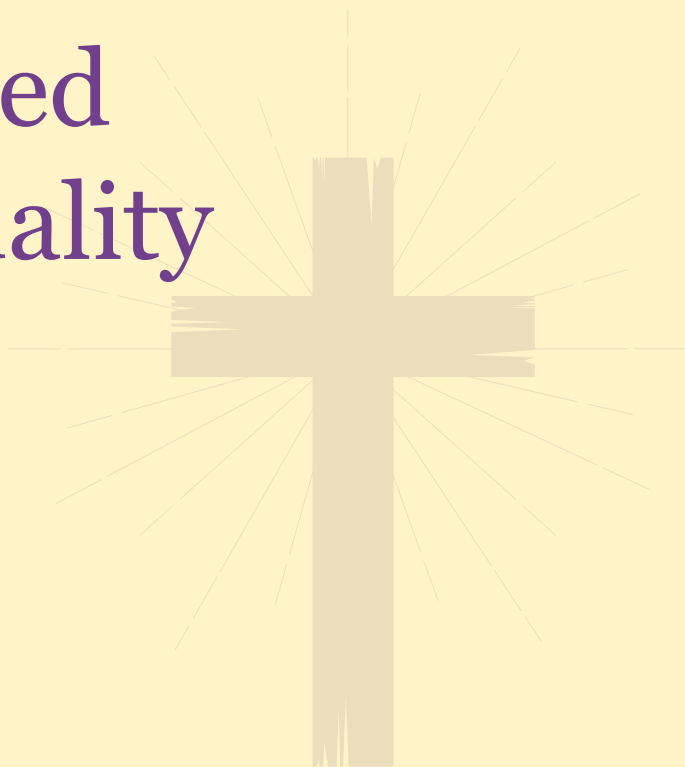


4TH SUNDAY OF LENT, 27 MARCH 2022
(LAETARE SUNDAY)

Between
Repentance,
Righteous Anger,
and Creation-
Centered
Spirituality



Laetare Sunday is Latin for "Rejoice." What it tells us that even in the midst of our Lenten penance, the Church reminds us that there can be joy and hope because of our faith and hope that is rooted in the risen Lord, Jesus.

Message of Laudato Si'

This shows us the immense dignity of each person, "who is not just something, but someone. He is capable of self-knowledge, of self-possession and of freely giving himself and entering into communion with other persons". Saint John Paul II stated that the special love of the Creator for each human being "confers upon him or her an infinite dignity". Those who are committed to defending human dignity can find in the Christian faith the deepest reasons for this commitment. How wonderful is the certainty that each human life is not adrift in the midst of hopeless chaos, in a world ruled by pure chance or endlessly recurring cycles! The Creator can say to each one of us: "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you" (Jer 1:5). We were conceived in the heart of God, and for this reason "each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary".

Laudato Si' #65

Take time to consider that we have many sides (or many aspects). There is a simultaneity to the way we are. This means that we can be both loving and hateful, generous and selfish, forgiving and bearing grudges, self-righteousness, and understanding at different times in our lives. Which of these parts win at times or most times in our lives and why? The week we look to God the Father to inspire us towards a creation-centered attitude, a way of being that is orientated and built on communion.

GOSPEL – LUKE 15:1-3,11-32

The prodigal son

The tax collectors and the sinners were all seeking the company of Jesus to hear what he had to say, and the Pharisees and the scribes complained. 'This man' they said 'welcomes sinners and eats with them.' So, he spoke this parable to them:

'A man had two sons. The younger said to his father, "Father, let me have the share of the estate that would come to me." So, the father divided the property between them. A few days later, the younger son got together everything he had and left for a distant country where he squandered his money on a life of debauchery.

'When he had spent it all, that country experienced a severe famine, and now he began to feel the pinch, so he hired himself out to one of the local inhabitants who put him on his farm to feed the pigs. And he would willingly have filled his belly with the husks the pigs were eating but no one offered him anything. Then he came to his senses and said, "How many of my father's paid servants have more food than they want, and here am I dying of hunger! I will leave this place and go to my father and say: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as one of your paid servants." So, he left the place and went back to his father.

'While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with pity. He ran to the boy, clasped him in his arms and kissed him tenderly. Then his son said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son." But the father said to his servants, "Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the calf we have been fattening, and kill it; we

are going to have a feast, a celebration, because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and is found." And they began to celebrate.

'Now the elder son was out in the fields, and on his way back, as he drew near the house, he could hear music and dancing. Calling one of the servants he asked what it was all about. "Your brother has come" replied the servant "and your father has killed the calf we had fattened because he has got him back safe and sound." He was angry then and refused to go in, and his father came out to plead with him; but he answered his father, "Look, all these years I have slaved for you and never once disobeyed your orders, yet you never offered me so much as a kid for me to celebrate with my friends. But, for this son of yours, when he comes back after swallowing up your property - he and his women - you kill the calf we had been fattening."

'The father said, "My son, you are with me always and all I have is yours. But it was only right we should celebrate and rejoice, because your brother here was dead and has come to life; he was lost and is found."

REFLECTION

There are three narratives centered around three characters in the gospel: the eldest son, the younger son, and the father. The gospel tells us that the youngest son saw the error of his ways and repented. He even decided to tell his father that he does not deserve to be treated as his son. In his repentance, he abandoned his previous state of being (selfishness/ hedonistic lifestyle/ his pride) in order to embrace his father again.

The second narrative is about the eldest son. Many scripture

scholars pointed to the parable of Jesus should be focused on the second son and not the prodigal son. The eldest son was visibly upset and angry that his younger brother had returned. He does not attempt to consider the process of his brother's journey that led his brother back. In a way, the eldest son did not "see" or "really see" his brother. Thus, there was no process for understanding.

The elder brother only saw what he did not get. He was the good one. He was the one who stayed. He was the one who did everything right, unlike his useless brother. Yet, he did not even get the calf for him and his friends to party. If things are left to him, perhaps, his brother will always be "categorized" as a useless brother and forever "dead." He is "ok" with his brother being "dead" forever.

Perhaps, the focus should be on the father who has a creation-centered orientation. To the father, everybody deserves to flourish and grow to be all they can be. There was no talk of second or third chances. There are always chances. The father's stance is one that is always ready and open. It was the father who first saw the younger son and ran to him. It was the father who first kissed and embraced him. It was the father who put a robe on him, a ring on his finger, and sandals on his feet. It was the father who called for a celebration. It did not end there. The father also came out to talk to the son to plead with him. Even the eldest son deserves to be brought out from his state of anger to a state of rejoicing. The father's attitude embodies what having a creation-centered spirituality is all about.

LENTEN EXERCISE

Are we cultivating a creation-centered spirituality? What kind of narrative always plays out in our life? Is it the younger son, the

eldest, or the father? We should be watchful that our attitudes are not like the eldest son who does not see goodness, is stuck in his ways, and where nothing can flourish because they have not met his approval. Those who have faltered may continue to remain “dead” with no hope for transformation or given “new life.”

However, the Father’s attitude is life-giving. Change, growth, and transformation are always possible with the father. The father was not concerned about giving his approval but that his son has come back to “life,” was lost and is “found.” The father wants both sons to be all that they can be. All the younger son had to do was repent and be open to the Father.

What kind of narrative do we live out? Are they a creation-centered spirituality that is life-giving and where life, joy, and rejoicing are possible? Or do we have the “elder-son” spirituality where nothing changes and the dead remain “dead?”

A final thought, is God more merciful than we are to one another?

“Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little.” (Luke 7:47)

MY STAND

- Let us commit to cultivating a stance of “mercy” towards all, especially to the most vulnerable around us. The vulnerable are the poor, migrants, elderly, homeless, orphans, etc. During this time of Lent, let us choose to be merciful by being aware of those who are having a difficult time during this pandemic. We can help at a personal or communal level by:
 - Helping out the efforts of our district by distributing essential supplies.

- Offering a listening ear to those who have lost loved ones, are depressed, or facing crises because of the pandemic.
 - Not turning a blind eye when we see a neighbour in need.
 - Volunteer in BEC, POHD, SSVP led activities (if available) to serve struggling families in your area.
 - Lifting those who have suffered and died due to the pandemic in prayer.
- Can I identify people or loved ones around me whom I have refused to believe and accept that they can grow or change for the better that I am a stumbling block to what God calls them to be?



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