

“For I create Jerusalem to be a joy and its people to be a delight; I will rejoice in Jerusalem and exult in my people. No longer shall the sound of weeping be heard there, or the sound of crying” (Isa. 65:19).

Our readings for Monday of the 4<sup>th</sup> week of Lent are full of optimism and hope. The Israelites exiled in Babylon truly danced for joy when the prophecy of Isaiah was finally fulfilled. King Cyrus of Persia along with his ally, Darius the Mede, invaded the Empire of Babylon bringing its downfall. King Cyrus returned the Jewish people to the Promised Land. He returned the articles of worship to the sacred city of Jerusalem and he commanded that the Jerusalem temple be rebuilt. While we give King Cyrus the credit, one must look beyond the earthly context to the heavenly reality.

I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, God’s dwelling is with the human race. He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will always be with them [as their God]. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, [for] the old order has passed away” (Rev 21:3-4)

In the book of Revelation, John speaks of a new Jerusalem, a heavenly Jerusalem. We often hear this text as we mourn the dead but rejoice in the Resurrection of Jesus and the promise of eternal life for the faithful.

“I will praise you, Lord, for you have rescued me” (Ps 30 2a). Our responsorial verse and psalm are also filled with hope and the promise of life after death. On Good Friday, our spirits are somber as we contemplate the loving sacrifice of Jesus who died on the cross for our sins. In the creed we acknowledge that Jesus “suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; He descended into hell; on the third day He rose again from the dead.”

Imagine the joy of those who saw Jesus enter the netherworld and break open the gates of the dead so that they could rise to new life in Christ. Actually, we don’t have to imagine to much if we return to psalm 30:

O LORD, you brought me up from the nether world; you preserved me from among those going down into the pit ... with the dawn [there is] rejoicing ... you changed my mourning into dancing; O LORD, my God, forever will I give you thanks.

Our Gospel from John (4:43-54) echoes this same sense of joy. The royal official goes to meet Jesus in Cana and asks him to come to Capernaum to heal his son who is near death. Jesus recognizes the faith of the man and offers immediate healing without traveling to the bedside of the ill boy. Jesus said to him, “You may go; your son will live.” (John 4:50). The son recovered and the whole household of the royal official came to believe. While we are amazed at this second sign from Jesus, we must look beyond the earthly context to the heavenly reality. God wants all of us to live with him eternally. Amidst the chaos of the coronavirus, we too must approach Jesus asking for healing as did the royal official.

During his Angelus prayer on Sunday, Pope Francis invited all Christians to pray the Our Father on Wednesday the 25<sup>th</sup>, the Feast of the Annunciation:

In these days of trial, while humanity trembles at the threat of the pandemic, I would like to propose to all Christians to unite their voices in prayer...reciting the prayer that Jesus our Lord taught us ... May the Lord hear the unanimous prayer of all his disciples who are preparing to celebrate the victory of the Risen Christ.

God never abandons us. Through the prophet Isaiah he offered hope and optimism to the exiled Israelites. To those isolated in the netherworld, he brought the light of Christ and set them free. In the midst of our fears and worries God is ever present inviting us to be people of hope and joy.

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