

## FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT – YEAR B

2 Chronicles 36:14-17, 19-23; Ephesians 2:4-10; John. 3:14-21

*Excerpts from Pope Francis - Angelus - 11 March 2018*

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Brothers and sisters, this Fourth Sunday of Lent invites us to joy. Why? First, because the entrance Antiphon of this Sunday says “Rejoice, Jerusalem” [...]. “Be joyful”. What is the reason for this joy? First, let us back up in time. The first reading summarizes the long journey of the people of Israel: neglecting the Law, the infidelities, constant refusal of God’s calls, the fall of Jerusalem and exile to Babylon. The Lord God sends Cyrus, the Persian king, who authorized the return of the exiles to Jerusalem. Consolation is at hand. It’s a reason to rejoice.

In the second reading, Saint Paul reminds us that “God is rich in mercy”. He goes on to insist that “it is by grace that you have been saved”. So, it’s not by multiplying good works that we earn our salvation. It’s important to remember that God’s love always precedes us. His grace comes before our actions. Once we understand that divine love is first, we can enter in that love and give thanks for grace. Indeed, God does not remain apart from us, but enters the history of humankind; he “intervenes” in our life; he enters it, to animate it with his grace and save it. Whoever believes in Jesus is not lost but enters in the light and eternal life.

Let’s not be like Nicodemus, a man of the night. We must come out of it and walk towards the light, which is faith. Jesus points out that whoever lets himself be guided by the light, “acts in truth”. It is not enough to follow the truth, to walk a prescribed road, but even more *to do* what is truth. In fact, the word *truth* has several meanings. The opposite can be error, even ignorance, or a lie. But another meaning of the word, which no doubt corresponds best to the one Jesus gives, is authenticity. When a person demonstrates this quality, we sometimes say that he or she is a *true* person. To be truthful, in the sense evoked by Jesus, is to be authentic, to do justice, to enter in the light.

However, we must reject the temptation to value our own self-confidence, to think we can do without God, to claim absolute freedom from him and from his Words. When we find the courage to recognize ourselves for what we are — and this takes courage! — we realize we are people called to take our weaknesses and our limitations into account. It may happen that we are gripped by anguish, by anxiety about the future, by fear of illness and death. This explains why many people, searching for a way out, sometimes take **dangerous** shortcuts such as the path of drugs or that of superstition or of disastrous magic rituals. It is good to know our limitations and our weaknesses; we must be aware of them, not to despair, but to offer them to the Lord.

He helps us on the path of healing; he takes us by the hand, and never abandons us. God is with us and for this reason I “rejoice”; we “rejoice” today. We have the true and great hope in God the Father rich in mercy, who gave us his Son to save us, and this is our joy. We also have many sorrows, but, when we are true Christians, there is the hope that is a small joy which grows and gives us certainty. We must not become discouraged when we see our limitations, our sins, our weakness: God is near; Jesus is on the Cross to heal us. This is God’s love. To look at the Cross and say within: “God loves me”.

It is true, there are these limitations, these weaknesses, these sins, but God is greater than our weaknesses, than our infidelities, than our sins. Let us take the Lord by the hand; let us look to the Crucifix and go forward.

May this Eucharist place in our hearts the certainty that we are loved by God. May our Lenten journey become an experience of forgiveness, of welcome and of charity.