

## The Fourth Sunday of Lent 26 March 2017

**“Rejoice, O Jerusalem: and come together all you that love her: rejoice with joy, you that have been in sorrow:” Is. 66:10-11**

(The Introit )

Today is called *Laetare Sunday* after the first word of the Introit. It is the midpoint of Lent and the Church wants us to consider the joy that will be ours with the Easter Mysteries. This can be seen in the readings the Church has selected for the Epistle (*Galatians 4:22-31*) and the Gospel (*John 6:1-15*). In the *Epistle to the Galatians*, St. Paul reminds the Jewish converts in Galatia that they have been freed from the bondage of the Old Law by Jesus Christ in the New Covenant made with the sacrifice of His own Body and Blood on Mt. Calvary. This New Covenant of God’s love is foreshadowed in today’s gospel about Jesus’ miracle of *The Multiplication of the Loaves and Fishes*. As Jesus feeds “*five thousand men not counting the women and children*,” (Mt. 14:21) so He will feed all His followers in the Holy Eucharist with His Body and Blood: the Sacrament “**of the New and Eternal Testament: the mystery of faith which shall be shed for you and for many unto the remission of sins.**” (Consecration of the Blood at Mass) While we rejoice at this midpoint of our Lenten time of penance, we should rejoice even more because we are children of God who have been called to eternal life in the New Jerusalem of heaven.

### Children of Slavery or Children of Promise

In today’s *Epistle to the Galatians*, St. Paul resolves the controversy raging among the Jews about the need for circumcision in obedience to the Mosaic Law before becoming Christians. St. Paul shows the Jews their error by using an example from Hebrew history, specifically the story of Abraham’s two sons, Ishmael by the slave girl Agar, and the other son, Isaac, by his wife Sara: “*And the son of the slave-girl was born according to the flesh, but the son of free woman in virtue of the promise. This is said by way of allegory. For these are two covenants; one indeed from Mount Sinai, bringing forth children unto bondage, which is Agar... But that Jerusalem which is above is free, which is our mother... Now we brethren, are the children of promise as Isaac was.*” Gal. 4:23-28 Dom Prosper Gueranger summarizes St. Paul’s allegorical interpretation in *The Liturgical*

*Year, Vol. 5*: “Let us rejoice! We are children, not of *Sinai*, but of *Jerusalem*. Our mother, the holy Church, is not a *bond-woman*, but *free*; and it is unto freedom that she has brought us up. Israel served God in fear; his heart was ever tending to idolatry, and could be kept to duty only by the heavy yoke of chastisement. More happy than he, we serve God through love; our yoke is sweet, and our burden is light! (cf. Mt. 11:30) We are not citizens of the earth; we are but pilgrims passing through it to our true country, *the Jerusalem which is above*. We leave the earthly Jerusalem to the Jew, who minds only terrestrial things, is disappointed with Jesus, and is plotting how to crucify Him. We also have too long been grovelling in the goods of this world; we have been slaves of sin; and the more the chains of our bondage weighed upon us, the more we talked of our being free. Now is the favourable time; now are the days of salvation: we have obeyed the Church’s call, and have entered into the practice and spirit of Lent. Sin seems to us, now, to be the heaviest of yokes; the flesh, a dangerous burden; the world, a merciless tyrant. We begin to breathe the fresh air of holy liberty, and the hope of our speedy deliverance fills us with transports of joy. Let us, with all possible affection, thank our divine Liberator, who delivers us from the bondage of Agar, emancipated us from the law of fear, and making us His new people, opens to us the gates of the heavenly Jerusalem, at the price of His Blood.” p. 320-21.

### Eucharistic Banquet in Heaven

In today’s gospel, Jesus anticipates the heavenly banquet by providing an earthly one with His miracle of “*The Multiplication of the Loaves and Fishes*.” Jesus has compassion on the many people who had been following Him for days and were hungry. He performs one of his greatest miracles in feeding this multitude, “*five thousand men not counting the women and children*,” Mt. 14:21 St. John in his gospel account of this miracle places it and *The Miracle of Walking on the Sea* just before His promise of the Eucharist by which He will give His own flesh to eat: “*I am the living bread that has come down from heaven. If anyone eat of this bread he shall live forever and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.*” Jn. 6:51-52. By the miracle of “*The Multiplication of the Loaves and Fishes*,” Jesus shows that He has the power over nature to make bread into His own body. Those who partake of

His Body and Blood will be guaranteed eternal life in the Heavenly Jerusalem. This is His New Covenant with His people. Sadly, many who heard Jesus did not believe Him. The day before when he had multiplied the loaves and fishes they had wanted to make Him their King: *“This indeed is the Prophet who is to come into the world.”* Jn. 6:14. St John Chrysostom commenting on this scene said: **“When He gave them bread and satisfied their hunger, they called Him a prophet and tried to make Him their king; but when He instructed them concerning the spiritual food, about eternal life; when He spoke to them of the resurrection and lifted up their hopes, when more than ever they should have admired Him, then they murmured against Him and left Him.”** (*The Preacher’s Encyclopaedia: Lent and Eastertide*, p. 183)

### **Eternal Life in Christ**

Today’s Liturgy reminds us that we should be filled with joy as we have reached the midpoint of our Lenten journey to the Easter Mysteries. We are the children of the promise from Christ, our Saviour; we are not the children of the bond woman and the old law which kept the children in slavery because it could not free them from sin. We have been freed by Christ and have been fed with His own Body and Blood which has been wonderfully multiplied and is our pledge of eternal life. As Jesus fed the multitude, so He will reward all with eternal life who follow Him and eat His Body and drink His Blood: *“He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has life everlasting and I will raise him up on the last day.”* Jn. 6:55

### **The Church Fills us with joy today.**

In the Allocution on the first anniversary of his pontificate (at the beginning of World War II), Pope Pius XII said: **“In the midst of penance and fasting the Church becomes a herald of Joy. In spite of present worries and preoccupations and the threats of even worse things to come we must seek the joy of the soul. ‘Beloved sons; if the Church whose wise teaching joins both austerity and sweetness in one perfect harmony, today bids us rejoice, we who are sunk in sadness, and if We, in a moment of intimate contact with you, do not hesitate to repeat that counsel, it is not that we have forgotten your worries. This ‘rejoice’ which comes from the mouth of the Church, our Mother, teaches us to find the serene joy of the soul even in the sufferings of nature and bitterness of heart.”**

## **Addenda**

### **Holy Father Canonizes 800 Saints**

On 12 May 2013, Pope Francis I canonized 800 martyrs of Otranto, Italy decapitated on 14 August 1480 for refusing to renounce Christ and accept Allah.

Bl. Antonio Pimraldo, the elderly tailor who inspired his fellow citizens to proclaim Christ rather than convert to Islam... (He) is the only name that has come down to us. His companions were 800 unknown fisherman, craftsman, shepherds and farmers from a small town, whose blood, five centuries ago, was shed solely because they were Christian...” The Moslem armada which numbered 90 galleys and 18,000 soldiers laid siege to the town with its 400 men at arms. “During the night, many of the soldiers of the guard lowered themselves over the city walls with ropes and fled. Only the inhabitants remained to defend Otranto.” After two weeks of fighting, the Moslems were able to breach the city walls. They went to the Cathedral where Arch. Stefano was in his pontifical vestments with the crucifix in hand. “To the order that he no longer speak the name of Christ... the Archbishop responded by exhorting the assailants to conversion, and at this his head was cut off with a scimitar.” The Moslem leader Pasha Ahmed offered the men “their lives, possessions, and all the benefits they enjoyed in their homeland: otherwise they would all be massacred.” Antonio Primaldo replied, **“Would that all believed in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and were ready to die a thousand times for him’...** And turning to the Christians, Primaldo spoke these words, *‘My brothers, until today we have fought in defence of our homeland, to save our lives, and for our earthly governors; now it is time for us to fight to save our souls for our Lord. And since he died on the cross for us, it is fitting that we should die for Him, remaining firm and constant in the faith, and with this earthly death we will earn eternal life and the glory of martyrdom.’* At these words, all began to shout with one voice and with great fervour that they wanted to die a thousand times, by any sort of death, rather than renounce Christ.”

They were all condemned to death. “... before the others, the head of the elderly Primaldo should be cut off. Primaldo was hateful to him (Ahmed), because he never stopped acting as an apostle toward his fellows. And before placing his

head upon a stone, he told his companions that he saw Heaven opened and the comforting angels; that they should be strong in the faith and look to Heaven, already open to receive them.

“He bowed his head and it was cut off, but his corpse stood back up on his feet, and despite the efforts of the butchers, it remained erect and unmoving, until all were decapitated.” The marvelous and astonishing event would have been a lesson of salvation for those infidels, if they had not been rebels against the light that enlightens every man who lives in the world. Only one of the butchers, named Berlabei, believed courageously in the miracle and, declared himself a Christian in a loud voice, and was condemned to be impaled.” Likoudis, p. 8A

Let us hope and pray that we will all have the courage St. Antonio Primaldo and his 800 Companions to proclaim our Catholic faith and our belief in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. (From Paul Likoudis, *“Holy Father To Proclaim 800 Saints,” The Wanderer*, May 9, 2013, p. 8A