

## Fourth Sunday of Lent

**Pink or Laetare Sunday is the liturgical way to remind us during this somber season of Lent, to "lighten up" and remember that our salvation is a present reality.**

**Often we, as Prophetic Disciples can take for granted, the most marvelous event ever to shake human history. It was summed up in the Gospel just proclaimed to you: "God so loved the world that God gave God's only Begotten One, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). Three words in that sentence are crucial: love, give, life. God loved...so God gave...that we might live. Each word is mystery-laden, but the mystery has been somewhat unveiled. A word on each word.**

### **I. Love**

**First, "God so loved the world." It's awesome. Many of us—perhaps most of us—have a fearsome idea of God. For whatever reason—childhood experience, grade-school religion, a fire and brimstone homilist—many a Christian sees God only as judge. I mean the God who "answered [Moses] in thunder" (Exodus 19:19). The God who sent serpents to bite the people (Numbers 21: 6; the God who refused to let Moses enter the Promised Land "because you broke faith with me" (Deut 32:51); the God who punished David's offspring for David's adultery. -etc. etc. Unfortunately, many grow up to see in the Hebrew Scriptures a punishing God, a God waiting to pounce on the sinner.**

**Often we fail to remember the God who heard Israel's cry of despair and responded in unforgettable phrases that spell LOVE.**

**"Can a woman forget her sucking child,  
that she should have no compassion  
on the son of her womb?  
Even these may forget,  
yet I will not forget you.**

**Behold, I have graven you on the palms of my hands. (Isa. 49:14—16a)**

**This is the God of whom the Psalmist sings:**

**The Lord is merciful and gracious,  
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love... (Ps. 103:8—14)**

**This is the same God to whom the New Testament bears witness from beginning to end, the God of whom the First Letter of John declares:  
"Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and one who loves is born of God and knows God. One who does not love does not know God; for God is**

**love...In this is love, not that we loved God but that God loved us..." (1 Jn 4:7—10).**

**God...is...love. You can have all sorts of philosophical "fun and games" with that three-syllable sentence. Of no one else can you say, "He or she is love." You can be uniquely loving and lovable, but only God exhausts the total meaning of love.**

**That concept is not as abstract as we may think. The First Letter of John puts it in perspective for us- "let us not love only in word or speech but in deed and in truth". St. Ignatius insisted, Sometimes parents don't tell their children they love them often enough. Sometimes we don't tell our partners and loved ones we love them often enough. I don't remember my immigrant father saying, " I love you", on a regular basis, to my brother and me. And so it is with God. The God who is love gave us a gift. Not a lifeless thing, silver or gold; not an angel; not another patriarch like Abraham, another prophet like Jeremiah. God gave us God's only Begotten One God gave you and me the Christ.**

## **II. Give or Gift**

**The gift was a baby shivering in straw —at once the Son of the Most High and the child of a Jewish teen-ager. The gift was an adolescent who called God his Parent. The gift was a man of 30 who scuffed the dust of Palestine from one end to the other because "The Spirit of God was up him: to preach good news to the poor; to proclaim release to the captives and sight to the blind, to set at liberty the oppressed. The gift was a man sold for silver by one of his intimate friends, delivered to his enemies by a cowardly Roman, whipped like a dog, crowned with thorns, pinned to twin beams of wood, and left to die between two criminals. The gift was a Christ raised from the rock dead, by the power of God, to demonstrate to us- once and for all- the folly of human material life.**

## **III. Life**

**This leads into the third point. The gift, Jesus, is not something out there. Why did God give us Jesus? Jesus made it quite clear: "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10b). Life. Focus on that word—one of the most important four-letter words you'll ever experience.**

**There are different levels to being alive. To be alive on a merely human level is to think and be free, to have purpose and passion. To that extent all of us are reasonably alive.**

**But in giving us Christ, God had much more life in mind than book knowledge or the Dow Jones, or a night at the bars. We heard it in St. Paul's upbeat proclamation to the Christians of Ephesus, capital of the Roman province of Asia:**

**God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which God loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ...and raised us up with Christ...For by grace we have been saved through faith; and this is not of our own doing, it is the gift of God...For we are [God's] workmanship, created in Christ (Eph 2:4—10)**

**Alive with Christ? What can that mean in plain English? Paul put it simply yet profoundly: We are "a new creation" (2 Cor 5:17). We are radically different from what we would have been if Christ had not come, had not carried a cross to Calvary. But precisely how? We know what it means, what it feels like, to be humanly alive.**

**We can think, shape an idea, argue a point, listen to Mozart or Michael Jackson. We can do things: work and play, walk and sing, love and laugh, "pump iron" or sway to aerobics.**

**To be alive with Christ means that in the power of Christ's passion we can think and act, live and love, more fantastically than we can imagine. We can believe what passes belief: accept God's word for the incredible Creed we repeat so absent-mindedly each Sunday. We can hope for what seems hopeless: confidently expect that God will be with us wherever we are in this life, and on through in the next. We can love as we've never loved before, as Christ has loved us: love without looking for what we can get out of it, love those we don't like, love the outcasts of our world, love when it costs us. Alive in the truth of who we are- the image of God.**

**Because we have been loved, gifted and alive in Christ, we have the courage to be Prophetic Disciples. Not wearing out the knees of our slacks waiting for God. We know God is here, the risen Christ is here: because we have gathered together in Jesus' name; when you exclaim "This is the word of the Lord"; when the celebrant murmurs in Christ's person, "This is my body which will be given for you"; when we cradle in our hands the living Word of God. The passion of Christ did not end on the first Good Friday. The passion of Christ surrounds us to be whom we are, to speak our truth, to stand against injustice, hatred and bigotry. This Lent should energize us to repent of our**

**smallness, fast from our selfishness and abstain from isolation; energize us to become more involved with this community; energize us to speak the truth of God's inclusive and all forgiving love to our Church.**

**You and I have been graced indeed, gifted by God beyond our deserving. As disciples we follow Christ faithfully and speak prophetically of a world, a Church, free of human barriers that exclude. There is a price, as martyred theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer saw in World War II. He said, "Grace that comes cheap, grace that keeps us ever so comfortable, will never redeem this sin-scarred earth. Only costly grace can do that." Only Prophetic Discipleship that speaks and lives God's love and inclusive truth, can have the power to change the deadness of our world into resurrected structures of love and life.**

**As we continue to commit ourselves through this Eucharist, let us accept the grace of Prophetic Discipleship. A grace that ultimately gives us love, redemption and eternal life.**