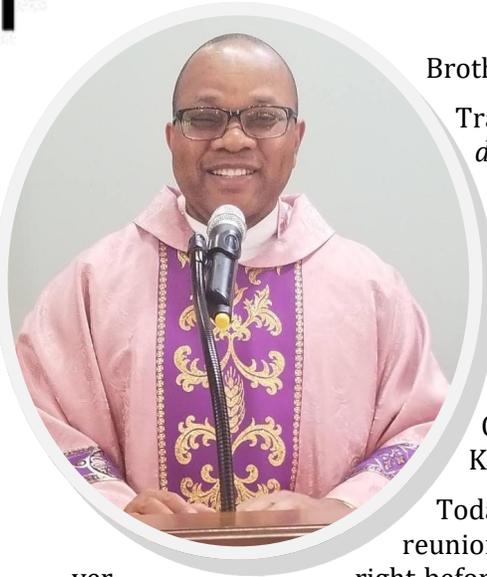


FROM THE DESK OF

Fr. Julius



Brothers and Sisters in Christ: Grace and Peace!

Traditionally, this Fourth Sunday of Lent is called the “*Laetare Sunday*”. This exultation coming in the middle of Lent focuses on *rejoicing*, elevating us to take up our journey with renewed eagerness! One could call it an intermission of sorts, an opportunity for a breather, and then to dive in deeper with our Lenten program. The Holy Mother Church reminds us how suitable today’s Holy Day is in seeing joy, despite being in the midst of our struggles. We only need to look at today’s candidates for Confirmation receiving the special gifts of the Holy Spirit! Visiting is Bishop Richard Stika, the Chief Shepherd, successor of the Apostles here in the Diocese of Knoxville.

Today’s readings deeply bind us to a God who is looking forward to a reunion with a fallen humanity. Joshua tells of the celebration of the Passover, right before the manna ceased. In the Second Reading, St. Paul in his letter to the Corinthians celebrates the “new creation” as he invites the Corinthian Christian community to rejoice; Jesus has reconciled us with God by his suffering and death on the cross.

Our Gospel narrative is one of the most cherished and acclaimed parables of Jesus. It celebrates the love and forgiveness of a ‘prodigal father’ for the ‘prodigal (albeit wayward) son’ on his “homecoming” by throwing a large festivity in his honor. All could have been quite joyous, but for the grumbling self-righteous elder brother. In all actuality, both sons are estranged from God, as we see little of God’s love in ongoing response to the father, until the younger son discovers a hunger that is not assuaged. Now today, are we in a better position to receive God’s forgiveness and to experience Jesus’ Personal Presence in the Holy Eucharist as loving mercy?

This parable remains for me a classic story of repentance and a return to the Father, who is always waiting for us to take our rightful place at His table. It is quite striking that God runs to embrace us not minding how dirty we might look on our way home. As prodigal children, we are facing a spiritual famine all around us in a cold secularism. Without the Lord over our lives, there abounds drug and alcohol abuse, fraud and theft in the workplace, murders, abortions, violence, racism, greed, the ‘great reset’ and all of which divides us from His love. These offenses have proliferated because we have been squandering God’s abundant blessings; hence, pray that we receive help toward repentance and return to our Heavenly Father’s home.

Do we realize that every Mass is a return to our loving Father’s house?! Beginning with Confiteor, (I confess to Almighty God) and through the offertory, we surrender our sinful lives to God our Father. Then, at the Consecration, the center of the Mass, the priest invites us to personally partake in the sacrifice on Calvary. Looking away from the ‘older son’, may we never allow pride to keep us from returning to the Father, Amen! I am grateful to all who were able to attend our Lenten general penance service last week.

Happy Laetare Sunday!