

Laetare - Fourth Sunday in Lent

Hymns: 375, 391, 312, 381

(omit Gloria, responses before & after the Gospel reading, and other ascriptions of praise during Lent.)

The INTROIT

(Ps. 66:10; 122:1)

P: Rejoice ye with Jerusalem, and be glad with her:

C: all ye that love her.

P: Rejoice for joy with her:

C: all ye that mourn for her.

P: I was glad when they said unto me:

C: Let us go into the house of the LORD.

(The "Gloria in Excelsis" is omitted during the Penitential Season of Lent)

The COLLECT

Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we, who for our evil deeds do worthily deserve to be punished, by the comfort of Thy grace may mercifully be relieved; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

The FIRST LESSON

Isaiah 49:8-13 (NKJV)

Thus says the LORD: "In an acceptable time I have heard You, And in the day of salvation I have helped You; I will preserve You and give You As a covenant to the people, To restore the earth, To cause them to inherit the desolate heritages; That You may say to the prisoners, 'Go forth,' To those who are in darkness, 'Show yourselves.' They shall feed along the roads, And their pastures shall be on all desolate heights. They shall neither hunger nor thirst, Neither heat nor sun shall strike them; For He who has mercy on them will lead them, Even by the springs of water He will guide them. I will make each of My mountains a road, And My highways shall be elevated. Surely these shall come from afar; Look! Those from the north and the west, And these from the land of Sinim." Sing, O heavens! Be joyful, O earth! And break out in singing, O mountains! For the LORD has comforted His people, And will have mercy on His afflicted.

THE GRADUAL

(Psalm 143:9-10; 18:48; 129:1-2)

P: Deliver me, O Lord, from mine enemies; teach me to do Thy will.

C: He delivereth me from mine enemies; yea, Thou liftest me up above those that rise up against me; Thou hast delivered me from the violent man.

P: Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth.

C: May Israel now say; many a time have they afflicted me from my youth. Yet they have not prevailed against me.

The EPISTLE

Galatians 4:21-31 (NKJV)

Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through

promise. Which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar; for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children; but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written:

“Rejoice, O barren, You who do not bear!
Break forth and shout, You who are not in labor!
For the desolate has many more children
Than she who has a husband.”

Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise. But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? “Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.” So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free.

The SENTENCE for the Season

(Philippians 2:8)

P: Christ has humbled himself, and become obedient unto death:

C: even the death of the cross.

The HOLY GOSPEL

St. John 6:1-15 (NKJV)

After these things Jesus went over the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. Then a great multitude followed Him, because they saw His signs which He performed on those who were diseased. And Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat with His disciples. Now the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was near.

Then Jesus lifted up His eyes, and seeing a great multitude coming toward Him, He said to Philip, “Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?” But this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do.

Philip answered Him, “Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little.”

One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to Him, “There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?”

Then Jesus said, “Make the people sit down.” Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand.

And Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks He distributed them to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down; and likewise of the fish, as much as they wanted.

So when they were filled, He said to His disciples, “Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost.” Therefore they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten. Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, “This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.”

Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone.

Galatians 4:21-31 — “The Jerusalem above Is Free”

INTRODUCTION

I. FOR IT IS WRITTEN THAT ABRAHAM HAD TWO SONS

II. THE JERUSALEM ABOVE IS FREE

III. THE MOTHER OF US ALL

CONCLUSION

Galatians 4:21-31 — “The Jerusalem above Is Free”

Grace, mercy, and peace to you all from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen.

The Epistle reading appointed for this Sunday of Laetare is Galatians 4:21-31:

Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise. Which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar; for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children; but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written:

**“Rejoice, O barren, You who do not bear!
Break forth and shout, You who are not in labor!
For the desolate has many more children
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Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise. But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? “Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.” So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

“Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law?” The church in Galatia received these very strong words from the Apostle Paul. Yet these words are not recorded for them alone, but for the Church that stands for all time against the gates of hell. **“Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law?”** Are we listening today? Do we really hear the Law? What does the Law say that is so often not heard?

I. FOR IT IS WRITTEN THAT ABRAHAM HAD TWO SONS

Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise. Which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount

Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar; for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children; but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all.

Do you not hear the Law? The Law declares that Abraham had TWO sons. Both sons were truly sons of Abraham. Yet one son was not free. Only one son was free.

What was different between the two sons? Why was one in bondage while the other lived free?

The difference was that they were born of different mothers. St. Paul says that this is allegorical. He says that these two circumstances are an allegory of two testaments. One testament was given to point to the other. One testament is bound to the flesh. The other testament is bound to the promised Seed.

The Old Testament was made in the flesh. It was the Testament of Circumcision. The Hebrew word for testament literally means to cut. Circumcision was a cutting of the flesh, a cutting away of the foreskin of those whose connection to the promise was directly dependent upon the use of the one flesh union. Circumcision was the cutting of God's mark upon the flesh of those who would be saved by God's flesh born of Mary apart from any circumcised male flesh. Thus the promise is not of the testament of circumcision.

Circumcision was a cutting that caused the shedding of blood, Abraham's blood. By means of Abraham's blood and the blood of his sons, God bound His people in the flesh to the blood that God Himself would shed through the promised Seed of the Woman. When Moses received the LORD's call to be His servant of the Word, the LORD threatened to strike down His servant on account of Moses not having circumcised his son. When Zipporah, Moses' wife circumcised their son, the LORD released Moses and Zipporah said, **"You are a husband of blood."**

Throughout the generations, the testament of circumcision held the people of God in bondage to the flesh. This testament bound the sons of Abraham to the act of shedding the blood of the sons and marking them in their flesh of union until the Son of promise would be born cut off from this bondage of the flesh. For the promised Seed was bound in the flesh of Abraham and his sons of promise until the Son of God should be born of the Woman. Jesus was not born through the fleshly union, for His Father is God. Therefore He is the fulfillment and the end of the Law. In His flesh the Law is fulfilled and the bondage of circumcision is finished. The sacrifice of His flesh and His blood was that end of all sacrifice.

With Moses, the testament of Circumcision received additional ceremonial requirements, all of which were part of that Old Testament by which God cut off His people to be His special Testament to the world concerning the salvation that would be born from heaven. In connection with this ceremonial law that was bound to the people of the Testament of Circumcision, the promise of the Seed that would crush the head of the serpent was guaranteed. As long as the people of the Circumcision continued, God's Testament in the flesh continued to point to the one who would redeem the world by the sacrifice of His own flesh and blood. Until that time, the Promised Land with the Holy City of God and the sacrifices of the Temple and all of the ceremonies bound to the Testament of Circumcision kept the people in bondage to the special service or liturgy that would keep them looking to the great day of freedom that Messiah would establish for all.

II. THE JERUSALEM ABOVE IS FREE

Thus St. Paul writes about two Jerusalems, two mothers. The earthly Jerusalem was in bondage with her children. The earthly Jerusalem was chained to a specific location with a temple made of stones and with a very rigid liturgy. This Jerusalem was the Jerusalem of the Old Testament.

But the New Jerusalem is not bound to a specific location. It is above, meaning, with God. Wherever God is present with His people, the Jerusalem of freedom is found. This Jerusalem is the Bride of Christ. She and her children are freed from all of the bondage of the Old Testament. The New Jerusalem is made of living stones, earth that has the breath of life breathed into it. These stones move about and gather together not in a temple made with hands, but in a temple made with God's Word. For wherever two or three are gathered in the name of the Word of God, He is with them. Wherever these living stones gather into the Name of Jesus, gathered by the preaching of His death until He comes, the heavenly Jerusalem gathers her children to her beloved husband to enjoy His gracious blessings.

The New Jerusalem is truly free. She is found in every part of the world, wherever the pure Gospel and Sacraments are administered. Her children do not have to travel to a certain locale. They gather in every place where they find at least two or three who hear the Law and bow down in confession of their sins so as to receive the Gospel in the united preaching of the Lord's death till He comes. This is the New Testament in God's blood. His blood was shed for all and is offered everlastingly to all who gather into His name through the Holy Water of Baptism. He shed His blood and sacrificed His flesh when He was circumcised. He subjected Himself to be Baptized for us to take our sinful identity and to clothe us with His righteousness. He suffered our condemnation and punishment, this time shedding not only a few drops of blood and a tiny snip of His flesh, but pouring out His lifeblood and offering up His body on the cross. And this full and complete sacrifice made once and for all is now offered in the New Jerusalem for all to receive again and again until He comes again in glory.

III. THE MOTHER OF US ALL

Thus St. Paul declares: **“but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all.”** Hagar was not free. It was not her decision to be Abraham's concubine. She was not the mother to whom the inheritance of life and salvation was promised. Yet she could have rejoiced in the promise which she and her son were blessed to be partakers of along with Sarah and Isaac. But instead of rejoicing in this Holy Communion established by God through the promise, Hagar tried to obtain her place through other means. As a result, her son persecuted the son of Sarah, the son of promise through whom the promised Seed of salvation would come. Thus, to protect the son of promise the slave woman and her son were driven out. Where they could have shared in the blessed communion of the promise, they became wanderers with no true home. Today they still wander and seek to obtain God's blessings by means of the bondage the flesh rather than by the means of grace and promise.

But they and all the world have the same promise extended to them through the Gospel. And to all who receive Jesus through the Gospel, the heavenly mother embraces them as her children. It is as St. John writes in the first chapter of his Gospel account, **“But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”**

What joy is ours in the freedom of the New Testament in Christ's blood! St. Paul quotes Isaiah:

**“Rejoice, O barren, You who do not bear!
Break forth and shout, You who are not in labor!
For the desolate has many more children
Than she who has a husband.”**

Compared to the world and of those who seek to live by their own efforts, the Church appears to be barren. The world mocks the Church on account of the fact that her union with her husband is not observed except through means that seem powerless. Even the many divisions among those pretending to be her children cause our mother to be looked upon as barren. Yet at the Last Day the truth shall be revealed to all in such a way that no more mocking will be possible. Every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess the truth.

And on that day, how many children will belong to the slave woman? All of her children shall become her enemies and she shall be shown for the false mother that she is. But our mother will be revealed as the pure and holy bride of Christ. Her children shall join with her in rejoicing everlastingly in the purity that Christ has bestowed upon her and her children. No more sorrow shall ever be known by our mother nor by us.

CONCLUSION

And even now, though the anguish of this world surrounds us and afflicts us, while the bondage of our sinful nature still persecutes us and tries to steal away from us the joy of our Father's grace, mercy, and peace, we nevertheless live free. Our mother continues to open the doors to us and to call to us so that we hear the gracious Word of grace and everlasting promise. Our mother continues to call to us as her children to come to the Supper of forgiveness and freedom by which we live free from the bondage to sin, death, and the power of the devil. She continues to call us to the Supper where having been washed and made worthy through Baptism we are free to partake of the Holy Communion of God in the body of Christ. She continues to call to us to bow before God with our confession of our sinfulness so that He may pronounce the freedom of His absolution that Jesus purchased for us and has commanded that His servants of the Word must proclaim to us. Then in the true communion produced by this absolution, we gather to eat the body of that union and drink the blood of our life in that one body.

Such is the freedom that is ours as sons of the promise. Nothing is required of us except that as we hear the Law that we do not turn back to the Law with the idolatrous thoughts of fulfilling the Law by our own works. God insists and demands that we believe Him when He says that He has done it for us. He demands this because it truly is the only way that we may be free, and by His gracious promise we are free. In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus forever. Amen.