

HOMILY – 4TH SUNDAY OF LENT – 11 MARCH 2018

Today is one of those Sundays when there is 'Religious Overload', a lot going on, maybe even too much. Its Mothering Sunday, a beautiful time to acknowledge motherhood, epitomized by Mary, Mother of God and our own mothers, who carried us in their womb.

It is also Laetare Sunday, marking half way through Lent, a time of expectant joy, hence the rose coloured vestments. How are you getting on with your Lenten promises? I hope you are sticking to them, only three weeks now until Easter Sunday!

Thirdly, it is SCIAF Sunday, an important chance to particularly remember the poorest and most destitute people on the earth and do what we can to help them. There is a letter from Bishop Toal about this and the second collection will go for this purpose. The Scots are a very generous nation.

Fourthly, it is the Second Scrutiny today, for those coming into the Church at Easter. Overall there are seven adults taking instruction presently in our two parishes, we are inspired by their desire to follow Christ Jesus, in our own faith tradition.

So, as I say, there is a lot going on, just as I am sure there is a lot going on in our own private lives. My sister-in-law, whenever I ask her how she is, replies "I'm caput, I'm exhausted".

But let us remember, amongst all our pressures and worries, to put Christ at the centre of our lives. St Paul, a very busy apostle and evangelist, wrote in Ephesians, 'God loved us with so much love that he was generous with his mercy, when we were dead through our sins, he brought us to life with Christ'. Lent is a sacred time to die to self and our sins and rise back up with Christ. To do that, we must see beyond our 'busyness', that there is something very beautiful and noble and merciful that God is calling towards. We should, as St Paul says, reassure ourselves that it is not purely on merit but more so by God's grace, that our lives are restored.

So, there are three things I want you to do, as your 'Spiritual Father' in these last three weeks of lent. The first instruction to you all is focus on the person of Christ Jesus above all else in these three weeks before Easter. Don't fill your minds up to the brim with appointments, activities, ambitions, arguments and deadlines. Like St Paul, really value your prayer life. Remembering that, as Jesus tells us, in the Gospel today. "God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in Him may not be lost".

Secondly, purify your soul, your conscience, before Easter, of any sins on your mind that have not been reconciled, to come to Confession, before Easter, in both parishes. Lent is a time of purification and renewal. As Jesus says in the Gospel today, many people sadly choose to live in the dark, ie carrying guilt and shame, rather than to live by the truth and come out into the light. Remember, Jesus is the light of the world, the true redeemer from our sins.

Thirdly, in the spirit of Laetare Sunday, a word which means 'Expectant Joy', like a couple wanting to have their baby, allow yourself to be lifted up by Christ, from all that dispirits our lives, drags us down and can make us feel miserable. As the sap begins to rise and the reawakening of Spring slowly emerges, may it reflect our spiritual hope.

There is nothing more draining to the soul than an existence that is full of despair. Sadness, misery and moaning. Yes, we moan about the weather, the price of bread and milk, like the Rev 'I AM Jolly'. But think about it this way. We have Christ in our lives, at least, I hope we do. We have a Pope, Pope Francis, now five years the Holy Father, whose first encyclical was entitled 'The Joy of The Gospel'. We have an Archbishop who has assured us of the future of our two parishes. We have a new Catholic Primary being built in Winchburgh and quite possibly, a new High School. We have fifty children making their Sacraments and seven adults making their instruction. There is much to be joyful about, despite all our woes. The challenge of faith is not eliminating difficulties and tragedy but embracing those same challenges, with real faith and trust in Almighty God.

That is what brings joyful hope to the world. God Bless.