

4th Sunday of Lent B 2018

What pushes you over the edge? Is there a hot button that rips apart any semblance of patience and forgiveness? What sets you off?

A favorite this time of year is the city plow coming through minutes after you cleared the front of the driveway. It's not the operator's fault but it can set us off.

How about if the supermarket is all out of the sale item when you get there only hours after looking at the ad Sunday after Mass? That'll do it.

How about junk mail? Or robo calls on your phone? Or those worthless unsolicited e-mails peddling one dumb product or another?

Those will definitely do it.

Actually I've become pretty good at shrugging my shoulders when things like that happen. What can I do about it? **Nothing!**

Listening to the reading from Chronicles today I wondered how God stayed patient as long as he did with the chosen people. He, God, has a high tolerance for our actions. His is a special mercy.

The Chronicles reading is from the last chapter of the last book of the Jewish bible. It details the end of the Kingdom of Judah. Everybody, it seems, was living a life of debauchery: *the princes, the priests and the people added infidelity to infidelity, practicing all the abominations of the nations and polluting the Lord's temple.*

God was tested, but they had not pushed his button yet. The Lord, early and often the text tells us, *sent messengers to the people* because he loved them and wanted them...**urged** them...to clean-up their act.

So how did they respond? *They mocked the messengers, despised his warnings and scoffed at his prophets.....*

UNTIL THE ANGER OF THE LORD AGAINST HIS PEOPLE WAS SO INFLAMED THAT THERE WAS NO REMEDY.

God lost his patience with the people of Judah. He allowed armies of the King of the Chaldeans to pillage, murder, destroy the chosen. Any who survived were herded off to Babylon for 70 years of captivity...just as the prophets said would happen.

But God's mercy showed again. After those 70 years he permitted the King of Persia, Cyrus, to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem and allow all who believed to return to Palestine.

Jesus explained God's love and patience for us in a teaching moment for Nicodemus...the Pharisee who was "secretly a follower". John writes in the account, *God so loved the world that he gave his only son, not to condemn the world but to save it.*

The fourth Sunday of Lent is sometimes called *Laetare* Sunday. *Laetare* is a Latin word that means "rejoice." Traditionally, Sundays are named after the first word of the liturgy's opening antiphon. On this Sunday, the antiphon is taken from the book of the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 66:10-11). "Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad because of her, all you who love her." Even as we observe our Lenten sacrifices, we rejoice in anticipation of the joy that will be ours at Easter.

Easter is the essence of God's love. *Jesus is the light that has come into the world,* John writes, *but the people preferred the darkness. We wish to keep our sins hidden, even from God. Jesus has come into the world to reveal our sins so that they may be forgiven.* This is the Good News; it is the reason for our rejoicing midway in this season of Lent and throughout our lives.

Lent is the season for us to throw off all those petty annoyances that push us to be someone we are not. It is the time for us to develop our love and our patience with others; to accept disappointment and carry-on with the mission God gave each of us in baptism....to spread the Good News. It is time to bury our hot button.

We are renewed in our mission by receiving Him in Eucharist. We receive him conscious of the truth Paul wrote to the Ephesians: "by grace from God you have been saved by faith. We have faith that Jesus loved us so much that he gives himself, body and blood to us to bolster our work for the Kingdom of God.

That's what we celebrate this 4th Sunday of Lent. The reality that you are a work of art, fashioned by God in Christ Jesus for the good works He has prepared for you to do. *Laetare! Rejoice!*