

4th Sunday in Lent, 2008 (*Laetare Sunday*)

“Rejoice, O Jerusalem ...”
(Isaias 66:10)

Laetare Sunday – “mid-Lent Sunday” – speaks of the joy of one stage of Lent completed and an anticipation of the joy of Easter which is to come from the Cross. At Rome the “Station church” is the church of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem, chosen expressly in order to celebrate the joys and grandeurs of the new Jerusalem, the Church on earth and the heavenly City. The Mass opens with the words *Rejoice, O Jerusalem; and come together all you that love her* — a call to that unity, that oneness with Christ the King and Sovereign High Priest of the Holy City, which is the City of God.



If we go back to Abraham's victory in the war against the five cities of evil perversion, Sodom and Gomorrah, we meet the first High Priest and King — a mystical figure, Melchisedech. We are told nothing of the family he may be descended from and, again, nothing of his earthly end. All that the Sacred scripture tells us is: “But Melchisedech the king of Salem, bringing forth bread and wine, for he was the priest of the Most High God, Blessed him, and said: ‘Blessed be Abram by the Most High God, Who created heaven and earth.’”¹ Now we know that *Salem* means *Peace*; so that Melchisedech foreshadowed the Prince of Peace; and that Salem was later known in Scripture as that Jerusalem which God chose as His Holy City. David being the Priest and King chosen by God; it was the city where Solomon built the glorious Temple in which God made his presence known among his people; and where the Christ was to establish his kingdom which He founded by offering Himself as a victim for the sins of all mankind.

The kingdom of Christ is the New Jerusalem with which we rejoice today; and where those who have made the effort to live the Holy Season of Lent in accordance with the mind of the Church can indeed rejoice despite the sad state of Europe and our own sorry country where, it would seem, as we were warned in the Apocalypse, the Lord has taken away His golden lampstand. The late Archbishop Fulton Sheen in his series *Is Life Worth Living?* has one episode he entitled “The Kiss that blistered”. In this he spoke of the kiss of Judas being like to the seduction of Communism. We ourselves

¹ Genesis 14: 18

see that radical socialist Europe is an arch-seducer and has seduced many nations (including our own) into the worship of the “golden calf”. The seduction of Communism continued for seventy or more years. But now we have great reason to rejoice for there is truly a resurrection of the Church in the East. The Ukraine and Latvia cry out to us of the “wonderful works of God”. A revival of devotion that lay underground for so long: now those countries may boast of Seminaries that are overflowing; Religious Orders with their varied distinct traditions of spirituality flourish once again; the churches are filled with praying and worshipping congregations of people of all ages; it is wonderful to see the inborn piety of children and teenagers; and they carry this with them wherever they go. The Cardinal Patriarch of the Ukraine tells us that the people of the Ukraine had kept their culture; and he remarked that “where a people lose their culture, the Church dies.” Food for thought! We must rejoice in God providing His Church with the powerful means of carrying divine revelation to the wide world. There is so much that we ourselves can learn from it; and make ourselves part of it.

From the time of Mikhail Gorbachev, who first ordered that all the Russian Orthodox churches be restored exactly as they were before they were destroyed (a policy continued by the heads of state in Russia) to the time of President Putin when the Catholic Church has been restored — what a joy it was to see the Catholic Bishop telling of this wonderful work of God. He spoke of the “Domestic Church” which lived on underground; the old people teaching the young the Catechism by questions and answers, instructing their children with as much knowledge as they had, but especially “night prayer” and “morning prayer”, the Rosary and traditional family devotions; all this living on where they could not have Mass or the Sacraments for eighty years. And now it is back in full blossom; the Seminary with eighty seminarians – fine devout young men following the strict seminary training directed by the Church – standing in the shadows of the notorious Lubjanka prison where so many of their fathers and forefathers suffered and died – with many other martyrs – for the faith. Now truly a flourishing Catholic Church. The enemies are already attacking the good man responsible for it, maligning him with their great propaganda weapon the “media”; now doing everything possible to prevent the one he wishes to succeed him from being elected. But they are destined to fail.

Yesterday, on the global Catholic TV network EWTN, I witnessed Catholic Universities of the world – Mexico City, cities in France and Germany, the USA – with those thousands of students made one in a public recitation of the Rosary led by our Holy Father Pope Benedict. What a joy it is to actually be a part of the glorious wonders of God in His kingdom on earth. Through EWTN, the call of God has gone out to the whole world; young dedicated people are seeking the way to follow that call; in the Pontifical Seminary of the Holy Cross in Rome 1,400 young men from all over the world have given themselves to a life of prayer, meditation and study of the “Sacred Sciences” in a truly happy atmosphere of peace in a disciplined existence formerly unknown to most of them. That is only one of Rome’s seminaries; houses of religious orders of both men and women that have returned to their distinctive habit and spirituality have no problem in finding postulants and novices — not only in Rome, but in the USA.

Recently in Brazil we witnessed a glorious new church built on traditional gothic lines, being solemnly dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary by the Pal Legate, Cardinal

Rhode — a very large, spacious edifice filled to overflowing with a vibrant congregation of all ages. The Catholics of Brazil have kept their culture and were able to sing all the Latin hymns of the ceremony without difficulty; the majority wore colourful tunics with the same sacred emblem front and back, the colours differing according to the particular group they belonged to — altar boys, choir, confraternity of the Rosary, etc. It was indeed wonderful to see the numbers of young men walking in the procession at the end of the ceremony dignified and reverent, singing by heart *Roma Felix*.

In this year of Jubilee of the Immaculate Conception, all those who listen to the Pope and follow his directives will find solace and comfort in the devotion of the Rosary; let us be faithful to it every day; let us learn how to pray it more devoutly and fervently, with a genuine love of our Blessed Mother, with a strong faith, a firm hope and a firmer charity desiring the salvation of all mankind. Follow the guidance of the Immaculate Heart of Mary whose request to us all remains still: “Penance, Penance, pray for the conversion and enlightenment of sinners.” Make what remains of Lent one great act of reparation for our own sins and those of the whole weary world.

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