



Fourth Sunday of Lent (Laetare)

† Sunday 11th March 2018

In England and Wales

Cycle of Prayer – Candidates for the Sacraments

Keynote: Called to walk in the light of faith by God's grace

Second Book of Chronicles 36: 14-16, 19-23

The writer reminds us that God's People were unfaithful to the Covenant. *'All the heads of the priesthood, and the people too, added infidelity to infidelity, copying all the shameful practices of the nations and defiling the Temple that the Lord God had consecrated for himself in Jerusalem.'* Unhappily, even in this day these words may apply to all who claim to follow the One True God – none of us may be entirely without infidelity or guilt. This Lent season is an opportunity for us to listen afresh to the messengers of God, to the prophets of our own time – to repent and believe the gospel. In the past, *'The Lord God tirelessly sent them messenger after messenger, since God wished to spare his people and his house. But they ridiculed the messengers of God, they despised his words, they laughed at his prophets.'* The choice is our own; we may 'laugh' or 'listen'!

Responsorial Psalm 136 (137) – A song of lament and hope

Letter of Paul to the Ephesians 2: 4-10

With a sense of awe and gratitude Paul writes: *'God loved us with so much love that he was generous with his mercy.'* Yes! God loves us, despite our infidelity, our human frailty and our record of sin. *'When we were dead through our sins, God brought us to life with Christ – it is through grace that you have been saved – and raised up with him, and he gave us a place with him in heaven, in Christ Jesus.'* There is just nothing we can do to deserve the gift of faith. 'Because', says Paul *'it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith; not by anything of your own, but by a gift from God; not by anything that you have done, so that nobody can claim the credit. We are all God's work, created in Christ Jesus to live the good life as from the beginning he had meant us to live it.'* We have the opportunity to turn from infidelity and seek re-creation and renewal in Christ.

Gospel according to John 3: 14-21

The evangelist contrasts light and darkness, contrasts those who come to the light (Jesus), and those who live in darkness because of their refusal to believe. John tells us that Nicodemus comes to Jesus, "by night", it serves to emphasise that this leading Jewish citizen – in searching for the truth about Jesus – is looking for enlightenment and finds it in his faith in Jesus as Lord. Jesus said to Nicodemus: *'The Son of Man must be lifted up as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.'* The choice is to believe or to refuse belief, and Jesus continues: *'No one who believes in Him will be condemned; but whoever refuses to believe is condemned already, because he has refused to believe in the name of God's only Son.'* So we have the choice: to walk in the dark, or walk in the light! The early Christians called baptism *Illumination* – for them belief was like a light in an otherwise darkened room. Already we begin to look forward to the liturgical celebration of baptism at the Great Vigil of Easter, when we shall celebrate faith, and walk with lighted candles in the light of the Risen Christ.

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Note: Readings for Year A may be used and the Second Scrutiny of the Elect may take place. Feast of Saint Patrick, bishop and patron of Ireland – Saturday 17th March.