

Homily
Fourth Sunday of Lent
March 10, 2024

George Santayana, Spanish-American philosopher, is famous for saying, “Those who do not learn history are doomed to repeat it.” This sentiment applies well to today’s first reading. God made a covenant with His people. In fact, He made seven of them throughout Salvation History. Why, because He couldn’t keep them or honor them? No, because we kept breaking them. We couldn’t keep it together. We can’t seem to learn from our history. But that’s okay, it’s all part of God’s plan.

We have the Adamic Covenant between God and man in the person of Adam. Then the Noachic Covenant between God and Noah and his family. The Abrahamic Covenant was a threefold promise to make Abraham: “a great nation, a great name, and a blessing to everyone.” The Mosaic Covenant was broken and restored in the time it took Moses to descend and ascend Mt. Sinai. The Davidic Covenant was the first Kingdom and had the promise of a Messiah. The Prophetic Covenant foretold the coming Messiah during a span of several hundred years in which the Israelites are scattered and enslaved. And finally, we have the Eucharistic Covenant with the God-Man Jesus, His Death and Resurrection on Calvary, the final, complete, perfect and everlasting Covenant.

A covenant is more than a contract or legal document. A covenant is a promise or pact, with severe consequences if broken, made between God and His people, in order to make us His extended family. Why? Because He loves us and wants us to be with Him. But in order for us to be with Him, we must want to be with Him. There’s the rub. In the first reading, we hear of, “all the princes of Judah, the priests, and the people (adding) infidelity to infidelity.” Can’t we learn our lesson or do we have to keep repeating our mistakes, our infidelities, over and over and over?

Who wants to be with God for eternity? Who’s willing to do what it takes to be with God for eternity? This means following His commandments. And His greatest commandment is to love God and love our neighbor. How easy is that? Easy, yes, but not simple. In order to love, we must become Christ’s disciple, we “must deny (ourselves), take up (our) cross, and follow (Jesus).” Mt 16:24b

We must love God and neighbor as God loves us. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.” Jn 3-16. God is love and God’s love is perfect because God is perfect. And we are a reflection of God; we are made in His likeness and image. We have it in us, we just need to embrace this.

Who’s married? A civil marriage is a contract, a legal document between two people and between them and the state giving them certain rights and privileges. A sacramental marriage is a covenantal bond between a man and a woman and between the couple, now made one, and with God. Through Sacramental marriage, the couple are now one flesh in spiritual intimacy with God. It is a foreshadowing of the eternal wedding feast of the Lamb (Jesus Christ) and His bride (the Church). Are we bringing God with us in our marriage? Can you think of couples who brought God with them in their marriages? How are they doing?

Are we going to learn from history or are we going to repeat it? We have so many great examples of what to do and what not to do. In addition to the Old Testament Covenants, great examples of what not to do, we have the saints, St. Paul, our patron, St. Peter, on whom Jesus built His Church, the early Church Fathers, many recent saints we venerate, St. Francis Xavier Cabrini, St. Theresa of Calcutta, and we have our spiritual Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary. Why can't we seem to learn from history? Or do we have to learn from personal experience? Do we even learn from personal experience or do we find ourselves making the same mistakes over and over and over. I go to confession monthly and I could almost just play a recording of my last confession each time I go. Why can't I learn?

But that is why Jesus came, to save us once and for all. "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him." We have the best example of all in our perfect Brother, who took all our sins upon Himself, every sin I have ever committed or ever will commit, every sin ever committed from the first sin until the end of time. He can do this because He is perfect and He is infinite. He is greater than all the sins throughout time. And He does this because He loves us.

And every time we forget or fail or fall, He is there to pick us up. He gives us His Sacraments to strengthen, nourish and heal us. He walked the earth just as we do. He knows our struggles, our sufferings, our pain. And He is here, truly present, to hear us, help us, bring us along with Him, if only we will follow.

Today is Laetare (La-TAH-re) Sunday, the fourth Sunday of Lent. The word "Laetare" means "rejoice" in Latin, and the rose vestments are worn as a sign of the joy that comes with the promise of Easter. This is the the New Covenant. This is the purpose of Lent. This is why Jesus came. This was the promise of the coming of the Messiah. Jesus, the only Son of God, came into the world, and entered freely into His Passion. We will soon remember this on Palm Sunday and again on Good Friday. Jesus died on the cross to fulfill the Eucharist Covenant, so that we all may have life and have it abundantly. It's all part of God's plan.