

Learn Your Faith...A Weekly Education Column

Laetare Sunday

The fourth Sunday of Lent traditionally is referred to as *Laetare* Sunday. The Latin word *Laetare*, meaning “rejoice”, or “be glad”, is taken from the opening word of the *Introit*, or traditional Latin “opening hymn” of the Mass for the fourth Sunday of Lent. “*Rejoice, Jerusalem, and meet together all you who love her; rejoice exceedingly, you who have been in sorrow, that you may leap for joy, and be satiated with comfort from her breasts.*”

On this Sunday in Lent Mother Church relaxes Her penances briefly to look forward to the coming Resurrection of the Lord. Rose colored vestments, according to an ancient tradition, may be worn in place of the Lenten violet. It has been suggested that the rose color calls to mind the color of the sky in the morning just before sunrise. The darkness (the violet of Lent) has almost passed. The bright light of the fully risen sun (the white vestments of Easter) is sure to come, but is not yet visible. The darkness of the world without the Light of Salvation has almost passed, and the Church anticipates the Light of the Risen Son. But it is not here yet. As the Italians say, “*Gia’, ma non ancora*”. Already, but not yet.

The Advent Season has the same structure. The third Sunday of Advent is called *Gaudete* Sunday. *Gaudete* also means “rejoice”. Rose colored vestments are worn, and all of the above applies as well to the liturgical sense of the days anticipating the birth of the Savior.

Another tradition associated with *Laetare* Sunday is the blessing of the golden rose. In more recent times, the rose, a symbol of spring (Resurrection) and of the association of suffering (thorns) and beauty (the flower/the Lord) is blessed by the pope and given to some person or institution deserving of honor.

Furthermore, this Sunday was traditionally known as the Sunday of the five loaves because the Gospel was always that of the multiplication of the loaves; the anticipation of the gift of the Holy Eucharist at the Last Supper. The Lord’s death, Resurrection, and Ascension are made present to us in the celebration of the Eucharist.

The music of the Mass, which has been more subdued during Lent, may be more joyous on this Sunday. Flowers, absent from the church during Lent, may decorate the sanctuary again today.

Lent is not over, but a glimpse of the joy to come at Easter strengthens us to persevere in our penitential practices of fasting, prayer, and almsgiving (charitable contributions).