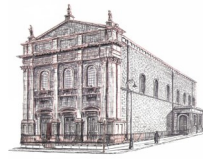




PARISH OF ST. AGATHA 1

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POPE FRANCIS: JESUS IS LIGHT THAT OPENS US TO GOD'S LOVE.

Pope Francis reflects on Jesus' identity, and urges Christians to welcome His light to open our hearts to the love of God. As the Church celebrates Laetare Sunday, Pope Francis invited Christians to draw near to the light of Christ and ask for His forgiveness. The Pope considered why the fourth Sunday of Lent has such a joyous focus. The reason, he said, is given in the Gospel: "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)." "This joyful message is the heart of the Christian faith," said the Pope, "God's love found its summit in the gift of his Son to a weak and sinful humanity."

LIFTED HIGH

In the day's Gospel, Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night to inquire as to His identity. Jesus, said the Pope, shakes Nicodemus' faith by presenting Himself under three aspects: "the *Son of Man* exalted on the cross; the *Son of God* sent into the world for salvation; and that of the *light* which distinguishes those who follow the truth from those who follow lies." The first aspect of Jesus' identity, said the Pope, recalls the serpent which Moses lifted up in the desert to save the people from death due to snake bites. Similarly, he noted, "Jesus was lifted up on the cross and those who believe in him are healed of sin and live."

TO BRING LIGHT OF SALVATION

Pope Francis said the second aspect—that of the Son of God—highlights God's gift of His only Son for the salvation of humanity. God, he added, desires our eternal salvation, and Jesus' mission is one of salvation for all. Jesus also describes Himself to Nicodemus as "the light", which is opposed to darkness. "The coming of Jesus into the world leads to a choice," said the Pope. "Whoever chooses darkness will face a judgment of condemnation, whoever chooses light will have a judgment of salvation." Judgement, he noted, is the result of our own free choice. "Whoever practices evil seeks the darkness; whoever seeks the truth, that is, those who practice what is good, come to the light."

REJOICING IN GOD'S FORGIVENESS

Pope Francis then urged Christians to live our Lenten journey as one directed toward the light of Christ. We are called, he said, to "welcome the light into our conscience to open our hearts to God's infinite love, to His mercy full of tenderness and goodness." God, he concluded, always forgives our sins when we ask for Him to.

UNDER THE PROTECTION OF OUR LADY

And the Pope prayed that the Virgin Mary might give us the courage to allow Jesus to "throw our faith into crisis." "It is a healthy crisis," he said, "for our healing: so that our joy may be full." (Vatican News/Devin Watkins).

THE NATURE OF GOD REVEALED IN THE HOLY TRINITY

The Fourth Sunday in Lent is called **Laetare Sunday** which means **Rejoice Sunday**. It is to bring us a sense of Joy and Hope in the middle of this somber Lenten Season. Today's Gospel (John 3: 14-21), reminds us that Christianity is sourced from the Blessed Trinity, in whose Name, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, welcomed us into the Family of the Church in Baptism. The Trinity (group of three) means the Father is **Love**, the Son is **Grace** and the Holy Spirit is the **Communion bond**. God is Three Persons in One and of the same substance. That is why we use the term *con-substantial*, when we profess the Sunday Creed. To help us understand the mystery in human terms, let us look at a man who is first born into the world as a **son**, then later he becomes a **father** and later again, he becomes a **grandfather**. He becomes **three persons but is still one man of equal substance**. The spirit of love for his family is sourced from his **one heart**, but is communicated in different ways throughout the history of his lifetime.

CRUCIFIED GOD'S OPEN HEART

God the Father, loves us with His open Heart on the Cross, in the Person of Jesus Christ, whose Sacred Heart is the Tabernacle of the Church. From this Sacred Well, flows the Life-Giving Holy Spirit, denoted by Water and also the Holy Eucharist, denoted by Blood, because blood is life. These are the **essential** Sacraments of the Church. Sadly the Children of God are deprived of them now when we most need them. **The Church exists not to condemn us but to Save us - from Hell**. Jesus tells us today (Jn 3:14-21), that *whoever refuses to believe is condemned already, because he has refused to believe in the name of God's only Son*. Many Catholics today, stubbornly *refuse to believe that Jesus' Risen Body comes to us in the Sacramental Presence of the Eucharist*. God once spoke to Moses in the **Burning Bush (Ex 3:1-17)**, He speaks to us now in the Eucharist, where He comes again on fire with an all-consuming burning Love for us.

THE SPIRIT CAN PHYSICALLY ACCESS ALL HEARTS

The Spirit's Mission is to sanctify (make holy) the Members of the Church. God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts. We worship the Holy Trinity in Mass all the time by repeating prayers Three times to Him. For example, we begin by blessing ourselves; *In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*. The Priest greets the Congregation acknowledging the Holy Trinity again, when he says; *the Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship (or communion) of the Holy Spirit be with you all*. Asking for Mercy we say three times; **Lord have Mercy, Christ have Mercy, Lord have Mercy**. In the Confiteor (Penitential Act), we confess three times to the Triune God. Entering into the Consecration, we worship each Person of the Trinity again with the praise of *Holiness*, three times; **Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of Hosts**. At the great doxology, the Priest again acknowledges the Triune God praying; *Through Him, With Him and In Him*. And again we ask for Mercy three times; **Lamb of God... Lamb of God... and Lamb of God You take away the sins of the world, grant us Peace**. This all should give us a sense of Trinity.

OUR LADY OF THE HOLY TRINITY PROTECTS US

Pray Three Hail Mary's every day to **Our Lady of the Holy Trinity** asking her for a New Grace for a New Day in order to fight and conquer the temptation to sin, because Mary is the **Daughter** of God the Father, the **Mother** of God the Son and the **Spouse** of God the Holy Spirit. God bless, Fr. Brendan.