

- Perhaps many of you remember that it was on this Sunday last year – Laetare Sunday – that Mass was offered in the Conference Room above the entrance to the Allen Center, while those of you who came sat in your cars in the parking lot.
- That was a very strange Sunday, one marked by the uncertainty of what we were facing with the coronavirus and how long it would last. Yet here we are a year later, still dealing with the pandemic, albeit now with some measure of hope on the horizon.
- Certainly, the past year is one that none of us is ever going to forget – as much as we may like to do so. And knowing that suffering never leaves one unchanged, there’s no doubt that we are all a little bit different now than we were a year ago.
- But are we better people? Did we grow in holiness through the sufferings of the past year? Did we spend more time complaining and griping, or actually trying to be of help to others?
- Have we grown embittered and cynical through all that’s transpired in the past year, or have we grown in faith, hope, and charity? Have we been able to find joy and peace in the midst of the sufferings of the past year?
- It is the mark of a mature and holy Christian to face all things, even death, with implacable serenity. We, as Christians, are called to rejoice always in God’s goodness and mercy, no matter what circumstances Providence should deem to befall us.
- Nothing should ever prevent us from rejoicing in all the blessings, graces, and mercies we have in Christ – no matter how severe our sufferings may be.
- Rejoicing in God’s goodness is our theme this *Laetare Sunday*, which marks that we are now more than halfway through our Lenten journey, edging ever closer to the joys of Easter.
- And our readings today remind us so clearly of why we should always hope in God and rejoice in Him.
- The epistle from St. Paul’s letter to the Galatians speaks of the blessed freedom we now enjoy because of Christ’s redemptive acts.
- St. Paul uses the analogy of the two sons of Abraham: Isaac and Ishmael, to make the comparison between those who remain under the constraint of the law and those who have found freedom in Christ.
- Accordingly, Ishmael, the son of the slave woman, represents the Old Testament when the Israelites were slaves to the Mosaic law; whereas Isaac, the son of Sarah – a freewoman – represents the New Testament, in which the Gentiles were made co-heirs to the promises of Christ through their faith.
- But there is a greater analogy here, for Ishmael, too, represents for us those who are under the bondage of sin, while Isaac represents those who have been freed by Christ.
- Our sins, at times, can seem debilitating. As we consider the gravity of our sins and the numerous times we fall into the same sins over and over, perhaps it is easy for us to get discouraged and to believe that God must be tired of us.
- How often have we believed that we could never be victorious over our sins? How often have we believed that our sins are too many or too serious to be forgiven by God?
- My brothers and sisters, this must never be the case! God’s goodness and generosity far surpass our wickedness – no matter how wicked we may be! And so we must rejoice, for hoping in God and rejoicing in His goodness is truly the proper response to His mercy.

- Thus, we must never despair about our sins, for there is no sin that God will not forgive if we are truly sorry for it. While we should nourish sorrow and contrition for our sins within our hearts, we must never worry about God's mercy, for He offers it freely to all who repent!
- But even more than forgiving our sins in the confessional, our Lord gives us the daily remedy for our sins in the Holy Eucharist, which we hear about in today's Gospel.
- This Gospel, which tells the famous story of the multiplication of the loaves and fish, prefigures the great gift of the Eucharist, by which we receive Him Who heals us of our sins and redeems us from our sins.
- In the Eucharist we are drawn into union with Jesus while on earth so that we might be prepared to be in union with Him for all eternity in Heaven.
- So even more than rejoicing today in all of God's good gifts to us, we must also make a commitment to live our lives in union with Him. The greatness of God's mercy and goodness demand this of us.
- We are God's children, and we know that God always provides for His faithful ones. That's really the point of today's Gospel and the story of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes. God always provides, and He's proven that in this past year of crisis.
- But if we want God's graces, we must be humble. The more we humble ourselves before God, recognizing all that He is and all that we are not, the more God bestows His comforting grace upon us. Remember this: God always helps us in the measure that we are humble.
- Brothers and sisters, Holy Mother Church bids us to rejoice this day as we near the end of our Lenten sacrifices and the glories of Easter. But let us rejoice all the more in our Lord's great mercy and love – which He happily extends to all who repent.
- May we never fear to seek His mercy in those times that we've sinned, but rather let us turn to Him humbly and confidently – yet without presumption – and receive from Him the grace we need to live according to His will.
- May we refuse to be conquered by our sins, trusting that if we are humble enough, our Lord will give us the necessary grace to free us from even our most habitual sins.
- May we be grateful for all of God's good gifts to us, most especially through our worthy reception of Holy Communion.
- And may we trust that by always turning to Him in our need, He will eventually make us into the holy men and women He desires us to be, for His glory and for our salvation.