

## WHY REJOICE IN LENT??

This Sunday is called “*Laetare* Sunday” (parallel to Advent’s “*Gaudete* Sunday”). Both Latin words mean pretty much the same thing: “rejoice.” But if Lent is a season of penitence, of sacrifice, and of sorrow for sin, why rejoice? Why not wait until Easter, when the Reason for the rejoicing is actually finally upon us (liturgically speaking)?

On top of that, we’re expected to make our annual second collection contribution to the Catholic Relief Services appeal (along with the “Rice Bowl”). AND this year we’re asked to be bringing in extra canned goods for city-wide Catholic food pantries sponsored by St. Vincent de Paul. All this giving—all this sacrificing and repenting! How can we be joyful in the middle of all this discipline?

I’m now thinking ahead to Holy Thursday. Jesus and the disciples are in the upper room at table. He knows this is pretty well the end; He knows sacrifice (His sacrifice) is about to take place. So what does Jesus do? He takes bread and wine and *gives thanks*. We call our celebration of Holy Communion “Eucharist” because it comes from the Greek word for “giving thanks.” I want to suggest that “giving thanks” and “rejoicing” are cut from pretty much the same bolt of cloth.

One rejoices when there is something worth being thankful about. When one has something for which gratitude is the proper response, gladness and happiness are typically a part of the emotional make-up of the scene. So Jesus could give thanks, He could rejoice, knowing that He was about to celebrate the ultimate Mass at the “cathedral” of Calvary.

His was a gesture of total self-giving, and we are asked (via the CRS and Food Bank collections) to enter into that gift in a partial way. As flawed humans, we only enter into the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ in a “partial way,” don’t we? A double opportunity this year might just mean a less partial entry for us...

Rejoicing is also fitting for us, depending upon how well our Lenten discipline has been progressing. Are we closer to our Lord in our prayer, self-control and active love of neighbor? If so, then surely there is reason for rejoicing here (see I Peter 1:6), even if there is some suffering (or simple deprivation) involved for the time being.

Our discipline should not be Lent-focused only, if it is truly a discipline that has as its purpose drawing us closer to Christ. After all, someone under “discipline” is a “disciple,” and this is what we all (in theory!) are striving to be. So let’s examine our Lent, see our progress (or lack of it), and resolve to be faithful for the latter (and smaller) portion of Lent that is left. Let’s be generous in our active love of others through food and money. And let’s rejoice in the doing!