



## SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



### Homily for Laetare Sunday, 2006

**Father Paul Kidner, O.S.B.**

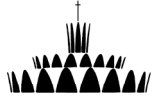
The theme which unites all three readings for this Fourth Sunday of Lent is the boundless mercy of God. The first reading, from the Book of Chronicles, is a summing up of the historical cycle of Israel's infidelity. Tirelessly God corrected his people; but their return to him under stress was only temporary, and in the end he destroyed Israel as a nation-state with all its institutions, including the monarchy and the temple. Yet even then God had pity on them and used Cyrus, the King of Persia, as his instrument to capture Babylon and repatriate the exiles. As the prophets point out, God's love is like the indefatigable love of a husband for an unfaithful wife, or a mother toward her good-for-nothing child. God's love and forgiveness are not logical, they are boundless.

It is "by grace that you have been saved." That is what we were told in the second reading, from Paul's Letter to the Ephesians. The term "grace" is used in contrast to merits. The grace, or favor, of God is unearned. While the favor of an oriental potentate who bestows his favors capriciously on his favorites, in God's case all of us are his pampered favorites on whom he bestows his endless gifts. His first favor is, of course, the choice of us to exist, and then to be chosen for the intimacy with God which is our life in Christ. The difference between God's favor and the favors lavished by potentates on their court favourites is that God's favor is not just a material gift, but it consists in a personal relationship with him, something that makes a real and lasting difference.

The final and complete expression of God's love is that he sent his son into the world for our salvation. St. John describes his coming in terms of the battle between light and darkness. What is evil cannot stand the clarity brought by the light, since it exposes evil for what it is. Jesus is the light who brings vision, warmth, safety and security.

God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world ... whoever does not believe in the name of God's only Son is already condemned, according to John. God sent his Son to bring his love to the world so that the world -- and that means us -- might be saved. We bring judgment on ourselves by rejecting this love; he does not condemn us; we condemn ourselves.

I said at the beginning that the theme which runs through the readings for this Laetare Sunday is the boundless mercy of God. As the Lenten Preface expresses it: "Each year you give us this joyful season when we prepare to celebrate the paschal mystery with mind and heart renewed. ... As we recall the great events that gave us new life in Christ, you bring the image of your Son to perfection within us." Let us strive to live these remaining weeks of Lent so that



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this may become a reality in us.