

WHAT IS LAETARE SUNDAY?

A little light breaks into Lent this Sunday

The Fourth Sunday of Lent (March 22) is called *Laetare Sunday*, when the Church takes a bit of breather from Lenten practice and begins Mass with the Entrance Antiphon, “Rejoice, Jerusalem... Be joyful, all who were in mourning!” ~ taken from Isaiah chapter 66.

Laetare Sunday, the Fourth Sunday of Lent, takes its name from the Latin word which begins the entrance antiphon (introit) for this day. *Laetare* means *rejoice*, and this Sunday is marked by a relaxation of the penitential character of the Lenten season. In Church, flowers may be used to adorn the sanctuary and the organ may be played.

We rejoice on this day as we look with expectation to the great Solemnity of Easter for which we have been preparing ourselves during the Lenten season. By its anticipation of the joy of Easter, *Laetare Sunday* is meant to give us hope and encouragement as we progress towards the Paschal Feast.

On both *Laetare Sunday* and *Gaudete Sunday* (the Third Sunday of Advent), clergy may wear rose vestments. The color rose is used as a sign of the joy which characterizes these two Sundays. The use of rose vestments is said to derive from an ancient papal tradition of blessing golden roses which would be sent to Catholic heads of state in Europe on the Fourth Sunday of Lent.

Celebrations or observances that we can observe to make this *Laetare Sunday* more memorable include to marking it as anticipating the Easter feast; a Sunday brunch with roses on the table would be appropriate. You might also plant a special rose bush on this day. Finally, there was a medieval tradition of visiting one’s “mother church” (the Church where one was baptized) on this day. A road trip to see where you or mom, dad or the children began their journey of faith could make for a fine Sunday afternoon outing!