

*But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!) For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of his grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus.*

*God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. [Ephesians 2:4-10]*

It was the final verse in this morning's first lesson which made an impression upon me. From St Paul's letter to the Ephesians:

*For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.*

'We are God's masterpiece. 'Masterpieces' are hard to come by these days. For the most part you need to go to a gallery or a museum to see one. The things we own are produced by mechanization and computerization. If we do own something that has been produced by a craftsman it is most likely to be very expensive. St Paul says that we are God's masterpiece. Each of us was painstakingly produced by God. In the same way that a painting, a sculpture, or a piece of furniture, manifests the work of the artist, sculptor, or cabinet-maker, so we too manifest the work of the artist, who in this instance is our Heavenly Father. We do this in those times when we are true to our very being, those times when we are sons and daughters of God. Like a masterpiece, we were each created to bring beauty to the world, His Beauty. Like a masterpiece we can shout out to the world, 'If you think I am that special, think how special is the one who created me.'

However, I think that it is very easy to forget our unique beauty. Beauty is constantly held before us by magazines, television and social media. Also, the latest estimate of the world's population is 7.6 billion people. Each of us, warts and all, is just one of billions. But just as the artist, the sculptor or the cabinet-maker does not view their handiwork as merely one of their masterpieces, God does not see each of us as just one of his masterpieces. He sees each of us as his unique creation.

We are not oil paintings, statues, or pieces of furniture. We are living beings who have free will and are able to choose to love God or to reject him and throw ourselves into living for what is temporal and which passes away. We have the ability to act as though we are not special to God, as though we are just one of the 7.6 billion.

In our Gospel reading we are reminded of that most well known of verses in Holy Scripture: *God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in Him might have eternal life.* Jesus did not come to condemn the world. The Father sent him to save the world of his hands. He came to save us, God's handiwork. But we have to choose the way of the Lord. That is the way of light. Any other choice is the way of darkness. There are many who prefer darkness over light. There are many who choose the way of selfishness over love. There are many who join in the immorality of the world. Those who do so condemn themselves to empty lives, condemn themselves to darkness. We cannot do that. We must not do that. We will not do that. We move towards the way of light that is the way of our Lord.

This Fourth Sunday of Lent has a number of different names. Obviously it is Mothering Sunday when we remember with thanksgiving our own mothers and all who have 'mothered' us. It is also called 'Refreshment Sunday' because the faithful were allowed to relax the practice of fasting half way through the season of Lent. The third title is 'Laetare Sunday'. It's a word which means 'joy', even 'light-heartedness'. Even though we are in Lent and are facing the heavy days of the commemoration of the Passion and Death of the Lord, Palm Sunday, Holy Week and Good Friday being less than three weeks away. We are still light-hearted, even in the midst of this dreadful pandemic, because we know what Jesus has done for us. He has embraced death so that we can have life. 'Lift up your hearts', I will say very shortly. 'We lift them up to the Lord', is the response. We are light-hearted because we know to whom we belong. We are God's handiwork.

The next time we look into the mirror and see a blemish on our faces, or a new chin that seems to be appearing, or yet another wrinkle, we need to think about what God sees. He sees someone He painstakingly made. We need to remind ourselves daily that we are special. We are loved. We have dignity. We are the work of God's hands.