

Fr. John Sassani
Homily Given on March 22, 2009
Fourth Sunday of Lent
Liturgical Year B

I served at St. John's in Winthrop for seven years. I had been there a couple of years when, on Saturday as I was preparing my homily, a man called. He said his niece had been in an accident and was seriously injured – would I come – and of course I did. His niece Kirsten was 17 years old. She had been out jogging and was hit by a drunken driver. She was in the hospital all summer for surgery and rehabilitation. Two years later, she was a student at Brown University, living in a dorm – and permanently confined to a wheelchair. Kirsten's parents were heartbroken, experiencing a chronic sorrow. Then they went on a pilgrimage to Medjugorje in Yugoslavia to pray for a cure. Kirsten was not cured, but her parents were.

St. Paul says that God is rich in mercy. Where we were dead, He brought us back to life in Christ. This is what happened to my friends – not the healing of their daughter's paralysis, but the restoration of their hope.

Jesus says that God sent Him into the world not to condemn the world but that we might be saved. Salvation doesn't always look the way we think it should. The Risen Christ on Easter is still wounded. It's how His disciples know He is not a ghost.

Often salvation is the gift of hope in the face of despair. This hope is not only hope for me or for you or for us, but our Christian protest against suffering and despair. My friends began a Christmas ministry where they and their family and friends befriended poorer families for Christmas in a sustained way. This gave them a chance to protest against suffering in a tangible way.

People who are given hope and can offer hope are needed in a world marked by starvation, exploitation, addiction, disease, growing poverty and homelessness.

Today is Laetare Sunday. We are called to Rejoice! Lent is half over. That may be no big deal. But suffering is half over – not just political or economic or medical, but by the death and Resurrection of Christ. It includes our living new lives, not only lives marked by hope for ourselves but by the good works that protest against despair and sorrow. It is lives marked by hope and good works that gather more and more people into the hope that Christ offers.