

WE ARE GOD'S WORK OF ART

Do you know the most expensive painting to have been sold since the world was created? It is a Religious Painting which might come to you as a surprise, but it is a fact. That Religious Painting is **Salvator Mundi** by **Leonardo Da Vinci**.



According to experts in history, Leonardo Da Vinci was possibly commissioned to sketch the painting after 1500 (16th Century) by King Louis XII of France and his wife, Anne of Brittany, following the conquest of Milan and Genoa. Leonardo Da Vinci's inspiration in sketching this painting was John 4:14, **“And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Saviour of the world.”** It was finished in 1510 and unveiled with pomp. The painting depicts Jesus Christ in an old blue Renaissance dress, with His gaze firmly fixed on the spectator, lightly bearded with auburn ringlets, holding a crystal orb in His left hand, with His right hand raised in benediction on all. Around 1763, the painting disappeared from public view and only resurfaced in 1900 when it was bought by Sir Charles Robinson, without him and those around him knowing it was the original painting of Da Vinci. When it surfaced in 2005 and its origin had been ascertained, it went through extensive restoration and in November 2017, it was auctioned by Christie's in New York and sold for \$450,000,000, which is the highest price any painting has ever sold for. It was bought by Prince Badr bin Abdullah Al Saud for the Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman. Since its purchase in 2017, Salvator Mundi has been preserved in a safe storage until the Saudi Arabia Museum and Culture Centre is completed and opened. Although Salvator Mundi is the most expensive painting ever to have been sold, it is refreshing to note that it is not and will never be the most expensive painting from God and by God. The most expensive painting from God and by God is YOU and I, as our readings this Sunday remind us.

The key to interpreting our readings on this 4th Sunday of Lent, which is traditionally known as Laetare Sunday, is our Gospel pericope from John Chapter 3, especially John 3:16: **“For God loved the world so much that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not be lost but may have eternal life.”** The love mentioned in the above passage is *Egapesen* which appears 143 times in the Greek Bible and refers

to **Agape** which is that Self-Sacrificing Love that goes out of self to seek and actualise the good of the other person. This self-sacrificing love of God is evidently manifested in today's First Reading from 2 Chronicles Chapter 36; the Israelites had disobeyed God and turned their backs on Him leading to their seventy years of slavery in Babylon. Even in their bondage, God was busy planning their escape; He completed that when he roused the pagan King Cyrus of Persia to set them free and to assist them in rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem. Why did God remember the Israelites even though they had turned their backs on Him? Today's Second Reading from Ephesians Chapter 2 answers that question – **WE ARE GOD'S WORK OF ART!** St Paul reminded us of that fact by reiterating that God loved us with so much love that He was generous with His mercy, even when we were dead in our sins, He brought us to life with Christ. Wow!!!

My friends, the one clear message I would like all of us to take home today is the fact that God loves you and I as we are. I know many of us Catholics were brought up with the '**Catholic Guilt**' that we are only loved by God when we are sinless; that is not true. The fact is that God loves us as we are because He created us in His own image and likeness; His love for us is so all-consuming that He wants us to be in constant communion with Him and to enjoy eternal bliss with Him which is why we need to be as sinless as He is. Yes, there is nothing we can do to stop God from loving us for **WE ARE GOD'S WORK OF ART**. When I was in Jersey, one of our parishioners approached me one day and asked me how I could possibly tell them that God loved them when she did not love herself due to the fact her mum abandoned her, her first boyfriend sexually abused her, and her husband cheated on her many times leading to a lengthy and ugly divorce. She asked me where God was when all those nasty things were happening to her. I held her by the hand and reassured her that God was that silent voice, the inner strength and the star guiding her throughout her ordeals. I then reminded her of another story in Jersey which was known by all our parishioners of a mother in our parish whose son was imprisoned for dealing drugs; although the mother does not support such illegality, she stood by her son throughout the 12 years he was in prison. Every Wednesday, this woman went to the prison and spent time with her son, she prayed with him and asked everyone in the parish to pray for him. After serving his 12 years sentence, she was the one who picked him up the day he was released, brought him home, cared for him and supported him as he rebuilt his life. Yes, our mothers mirror God's love to us and on this Mothering Sunday, we pray for and celebrate them for loving us as we are. Where would we be without our mothers?

Like Leonardo Da Vinci's priceless painting of Salvator Mundi, let us remember we are God's Work of Art, that He loves us individually as if we are the only ones in the world.

Fr Johnpromise Umeozuru

Homily for the 4th Sunday of Lent, Year B (10/03/2024)