

Scripture Study

Fourth Sunday of Lent – Cycle B



Opening prayer

2 Chronicles 36:14-16, 19-23

(Ps 137:1-6)

Ephesians 2:4-10

John 3:14-21

Overview of the Gospel:

- The encounter between Jesus and Nicodemus, which we hear about in this Sunday's Gospel reading, occurs soon after Jesus cleanses the temple, which we heard about last Sunday.
- Nicodemus (the name means "conqueror for the people") was a member of the Pharisee religious party and "a ruler of the people" (verse 1), which means he was probably a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish high court (John 7:45-52). He was interested in Jesus, but would only meet with him under the cover of darkness (verse 2).
- Jesus engages Nicodemus in a conversation about the necessity of baptism (3:1-9). When Nicodemus seems confused over the term "born again," Jesus emphasizes the fact that to understand the mysteries of God, one must think in heavenly rather than worldly terms (3:10-13).
- Jesus goes on to explain the significance of his mission, beginning with a reference to Moses and "the serpent in the desert" (see Numbers 21:4-9). This incident was a pre-figurement of Jesus being raised up—on the Cross; from the grave; into heaven—as a sign for us to believe and be healed from our sin.

Questions:

- The 1st reading from 2nd Chronicles gives a short summary of the events leading up to the exile of the people of the kingdom of Judah into Babylon around the year 586 B.C. What was the sin of the people that led up to the exile (verse 14)? In what ways did God try to warn them? What was their response? Through what means were they restored? What can we learn from their experience?
- What can you find out about the person Jesus is addressing in this Sunday's Gospel passage (verses 1-2, 7:50; 19:39)? What is significant about his coming to Jesus? Why at night (verses 19-20)? How is this related to what was said in last week's reading, especially verses 2:24-25?
- What two conflicting ideas about birth are Jesus and Nicodemus thinking of? What necessary sacrament is Jesus referring to in verses 5-8? How does Jesus account for Nicodemus' lack of understanding? What does the Church teach about being "born again" (verse 3:5; 1 Peter 3:19-20; CCC 1213, 1215, 1228, 1257, 1263, 1265-1270, 1277)?
- What does Jesus claim about himself in verses 13-15? From verses 16-18, what stands out to you about God? About what he wants to do? About how a person is condemned? How belief will manifest itself (verses 15-21, 36)?
- In what way or ways do you "believe" in Jesus? Intellectual acceptance? As the Son of God? As Savior and Lord? By picking up your own cross every day in faith and obedience? How?
- Are you more in the "darkness" or more in the "light" (verses 19-21)? What would it take for you to move more into the light? What can you do to make that happen?

Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 218-21, 309-14, 456-58, 604-05, 709-10, 845-48, 1257-61, 2002

Closing prayer

The faith given to me in Baptism suggests to me surely: of yourself you will do nothing, but if you have God as the center of all your action, then you will reach the goal. - Bl. Pier Giorgio Frassati

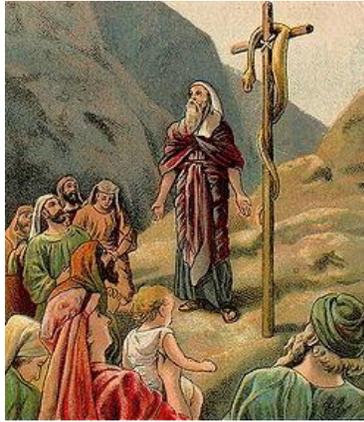
Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass readings!

“God so loved the world that he gave us his only Son”

Gospel Reading: *John 3:14-21*

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life." For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. He who believes in him is not condemned; he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does what is true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been wrought in God.

Meditation: Do you know the healing power of Christ's redeeming love? The prophets never ceased to speak of God's faithfulness and compassion towards those who would return to him with trust and obedience (2 Chronicles 36:15). When Jesus spoke to Nicodemus he prophesied that his death on the cross would bring healing and forgiveness and a "new birth in the Spirit" (John 3:3) and eternal life (John 3:15). Jesus explained the necessity of his crucifixion and resurrection by analogy with Moses and the bronze serpent in the desert. When the people of Israel journeyed in the wilderness, they complained against the Lord and regretted ever leaving Egypt. God punished them for their stubborn and rebellious hearts by sending a plague of



deadly serpents. When they repented and cried to the Lord for mercy, God instructed Moses: "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and every one who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live" (Numbers 21:8).

The bronze serpent pointed to the cross of Christ which defeats sin and death and obtains everlasting life for those who believe. The result of Jesus "being lifted up on the cross" and his rising and exaltation to the Father's right hand in heaven, is our "new birth in the Spirit" and adoption as sons and daughters of God. God not only redeems us, but he fills us with his own divine life and power that we might share in his glory. Jesus gives us the Holy Spirit that we may have power to be his witnesses and to spread and defend the gospel by word and action, and to never be ashamed of the Cross of Christ. The Holy Spirit gives us his seven-fold gifts of wisdom and understanding, right judgment and courage, knowledge and reverence for God and his ways, and a holy fear in God's presence (see Isaiah 11) that we may live for God and serve him in the power of his strength. Do you thirst for new life in the Spirit?

How do we know, beyond a doubt, that God truly loves us and wants us to be united with him forever?

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16). God proved his love for us by giving us the best he had to offer – his only begotten Son who freely gave himself as an offering to God for our sake and as the atoning sacrifice for our sin and the sin of the world. This passage tells us of the great breadth and width of God's love. Not an exclusive love for just a few or for a single nation, but an all-embracing redemptive love for the whole world, and a personal love for each and every individual whom God has created in his own image and likeness. God is a loving Father who cannot rest until his wandering children have returned home to him. Saint Augustine of Hippo says, "God loves each one of us as if there were only one of us to love." God gives us the freedom to choose whom and what we will love. Jesus shows us the paradox of love and judgment. We can love the darkness of sin and unbelief or we can love the light of God's truth, beauty, and goodness. If our love is guided by what is true and good and beautiful, then we will choose for God and love him above all else. What we love shows what we prefer. Do you love God above all else? Do you give him first place in your life, in your thoughts, decisions and actions?

"Lord Jesus Christ, your death on the cross brought life, healing, and pardon for us. May your love consume and transform my life that I may desire you above all else. Help me to love what you love, to desire what you desire, and to reject what you reject".

*Meditation: © 2012 Don Schwager
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