

John 3:14-21

Jesus said to Nicodemus: 'The Son of Man must be lifted up as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him. Yes, 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. For God sent his Son into the world not to condemn the world, but so that through him the world might be saved. No one who believes in him will be condemned; but whoever refuses to believe is condemned already, because he has refused to believe in the name of God's only Son. On these grounds is sentence pronounced: that though the light has come into the world men have shown they prefer darkness to the light because their deeds were evil. And indeed, everybody who does wrong hates the light and avoids it, for fear his actions should be exposed; but the man who lives by the truth comes out into the light, so that it may be plainly seen that what he does is done in God.'

Nicodemus, was a Pharisee and a leading member of the Council. It is likely that he was in the temple and heard Jesus and now he wants to know more. He comes to Jesus at night. Perhaps it is truly night, or maybe 'night time' symbolises Nicodemus' ignorance and fear. Through talking with Jesus, he is led to the light of truth, the light of Christ; a journey we are all invited to make.

What follows is an amazing summary of the Father's love - "*God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son.*" Jesus is very much the instrument of God's love. "*The Son of Man must be lifted up... so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life in him*". This is a reference to the time when the Israelites were in the wilderness and they had turned away from God. God sends poisonous snakes to punish them. But Moses intercedes & God tells him to fashion a bronze serpent & to raise it up on a pole. '*If anyone is bitten,*' God said, '*they should look up to the bronze serpent & they will live.*' So too, the Cross of Jesus will bring life to all peoples.

Jesus concludes by saying: *I do not come to judge you or to condemn, but to bring life – salvation.* How comforting and reassuring this message should be for all of us. Rejoice and be joyful!

Fourth Sunday of Lent

Year B

14th March 2021

The Son of Man must be lifted up as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert



The Fourth Sunday of Lent is known as 'Laetare Sunday'. The opening antiphon sets the scene calling us to 'rejoice' and be 'joyful' for we are loved by God and our salvation is near.

This theme is picked up in all our Readings today.

As well as 'Laetare Sunday', today is also 'Mothering Sunday'; a celebration that began in the 16th Century, when families would come together to honour the 'Mother' of the Lord. Today, it has become a day when we honour and thank, not only our Blessed Lady, but all mothers, recognizing the beauty and generosity of 'Motherhood'. We have so many reasons to rejoice and be joyful.

Opening Prayer

O God, who through your Word reconcile the human race to yourself in a wonderful way, grant, we pray, that with prompt devotion and eager faith the Christian people may hasten toward the solemn celebrations to come.

2 Chronicles 36:14-16,19-23

All the heads of the priesthood, and the people too, added infidelity to infidelity, copying all the shameful practices of the nations and defiling the Temple that the Lord had consecrated for himself in Jerusalem. The Lord, the God of their ancestors, tirelessly sent them messenger after messenger, since he wished to spare his people and his house. But they ridiculed the messengers of God, they despised his words, they laughed at his prophets, until at last the wrath of the Lord rose so high against his people that there was no further remedy.

Their enemies burned down the Temple of God, demolished the walls of Jerusalem, set fire to all its palaces, and destroyed everything of value in it. The survivors were deported by Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon; they were to serve him and his sons until the kingdom of Persia came to power. This is how the word of the Lord was fulfilled that he spoke through Jeremiah, 'Until this land has enjoyed its sabbath rest, until seventy years have gone by, it will keep sabbath throughout the days of its desolation.'

And in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, to fulfil the word of the Lord that was spoken through Jeremiah, the Lord roused the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia to issue a proclamation and to have it publicly displayed throughout his kingdom: 'Thus speaks Cyrus king of Persia, "The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth; he has ordered me to build him a Temple in Jerusalem, in Judah. Whoever there is among you of all his people, may his God be with him! Let him go up."' "

Psalms 136(137):1-6

*By the rivers of Babylon there we sat and wept, remembering Zion;
on the poplars that grew there we hung up our harps.*

*For it was there that they asked us, our captors, for songs, our
oppressors, for joy. 'Sing to us,' they said, 'one of Zion's songs.'*

O how could we sing the song of the Lord on alien soil?

If I forget you, Jerusalem, let my right hand wither!

*O let my tongue cleave to my mouth if I remember you not,
if I prize not Jerusalem above all my joys!*

Ephesians 2:4-10

God loved us with so much love that he was generous with his mercy: when we were dead through our sins, he brought us to life with Christ – it is through grace that you have been saved – and raised us up with him and gave us a place with him in heaven, in Christ Jesus.

This was to show for all ages to come, through his goodness towards us in Christ Jesus, how infinitely rich he is in grace. Because it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith; not by anything of your own, but by a gift from God; not by anything that you have done, so that nobody can claim the credit. We are God's work of art, created in Christ Jesus to live the good life as from the beginning he had meant us to live it.

'God loves us so much', Paul tells us, 'that he has given us his only Son'. Notice, how he refers to us as '**God's work of art**'. Imagine God standing there, gazing on us, admiring us, cherishing us! Paul says that Faith is a '**gift from God**', freely given, so that we are able to respond to God's love. Remember, gifts are not necessarily deserved & never won and never bought; they are freely given! Given, that we might come to know and to love God.

Praise to you, O Christ, king of eternal glory!

*God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son:
everyone who believes in him has eternal life.*

Praise to you, O Christ, king of eternal glory!

(Gospel overleaf)

Prayer over the Offerings

*We place before you with joy these offerings, which bring eternal remedy,
O Lord, praying that we may both faithfully revere them and present them
to you, as is fitting, for the salvation of all the world.*

Prayer after Communion

*O God, who enlighten everyone who comes into this world, illuminate our
hearts, we pray, with the splendour of your grace, that we may always
ponder what is worthy and pleasing to your majesty
and love you in all sincerity.*