

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

Reading 1: 2 Chr 36:14 - 16, 19 - 23

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 136: 1 – 6

Reading 2: Eph 2: 4 – 10

Gospel Reading : John 3: 14 – 21

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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: The Old Testament prophets never ceased to speak of God's faithfulness and compassion towards those who would turn away from sin and return to God with repentant hearts, trust, and obedience. 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" and eternal life.

The "lifting up" of the Son of Man Jesus explained to Nicodemus that the "Son of Man" must be "lifted up" to bring the power and authority of God's kingdom to bear on the earth. The title, "Son of Man," came from the prophet Daniel who describes a vision he received of the Anointed Messiah King who was sent from heaven to rule over the earth (Daniel 7:13-14). Traditionally when kings began to reign they were literally "lifted up" and enthroned above the people. Jesus explains to Nicodemus that he will be recognized as the Anointed King when he is "lifted up" on the cross at Calvary. Jesus died for his claim to be the only begotten Son sent by the Father in heaven to redeem, heal, and reconcile his people with God. Jesus points to a key prophetic sign which Moses performed in the wilderness right after the people of Israel were afflicted with poisonous serpents. Scripture tells us that many people died in the wilderness because of their sin of rebellion towards Moses and God. Through Moses' intervention, God showed mercy to the people and instructed Moses to **"make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live"**(Numbers 21:8). This miraculous sign was meant to foreshadow and point to the saving work which Jesus would perform to bring healing and salvation to the world. "This story is a type of the whole mystery of the incarnation. For the serpent signifies bitter and deadly sin, which was devouring the whole race on the earth... biting the Soul of man and infusing it with the venom of wickedness. And there is no way that we could have escaped being conquered by it, except by the relief that comes only from heaven. The Word of God then was made in the likeness of sinful flesh, 'that he might condemn sin in the flesh' [Romans 8:3], as it is written. In this way, he becomes the Giver of unending salvation to those who comprehend the divine doctrines and gaze on him with steadfast faith. But the serpent, being fixed upon a lofty base, signifies that Christ was clearly manifested by his passion on the cross, so that none could fail to see him."

The cross defeats sin and death

The bronze serpent which Moses lifted up in the wilderness points to the cross of Christ which defeats sin and death and obtains everlasting life for those who believe in Jesus Christ. The result of Jesus "being lifted up on the cross" and his rising from the dead, and his exaltation and ascension 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 frees us from our sins and pardons us, he also fills us with his own divine life through the gift and working of his Spirit who dwells within us. The Holy Spirit gives us spiritual power and gifts, especially the 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), to enable us to live in his strength as sons and daughters of God.

The proof of God's love for us

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 excluding love for just a few or for a single nation, but a redemptive love that embraces the whole world, and a personal love for each and every individual whom God has created. God is a loving Father who cannot rest until his wandering children have returned home to him. Saint Augustine 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?

Questions for Community Faith Sharing:

1. How do you know the healing power of Christ's redeeming love and victory which he won for you on the cross?
2. Do you thirst for the *new life* which God offers you through the transforming power of his Holy Spirit? Please explain?
3. How do we know, beyond a doubt, that God truly loves us and wants us to be united with him forever?

"Lord Jesus Christ, your death brought life 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".