



## FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT, CYCLE B

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*...whoever lives the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be clearly seen as done in God. Jn 3:21*

This passage is part of a conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus. Jesus has been teaching Nicodemus about the necessity of being born again, and now this section explains that this rebirth can only happen through the death and glorification of the Son of Man. Thus this reading fits easily into our Lenten focus on baptismal renewal and our calling as priest, prophet and servant king.

The passage begins with a reference to the time when the Israelites were in the desert and were bitten by fiery serpents. Moses made a bronze serpent and lifted it up on a pole, and all who looked upon it were healed. Similarly, Jesus is "lifted up" so that all who believe in him will have eternal life. "Lifted up" in John has a double meaning; it encompasses both death and resurrection. Jesus is lifted up on the cross and is also lifted up from the tomb on Easter.

The next verse is John 3:16, *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life..."* It is inarguably one of the most famous verses in all the gospels. Reflect on the question, why is that? Christians and non-Christians alike can usually quote this passage simply by hearing the phrase, "John 3:16." It is the core and central promise of all of the teachings of Christ, not only in the Gospel of John but of the whole New Testament. The verse is the Good News.

Looking back at our first reading today from 2 Chronicles 36 19:23, we hear: All this was to fulfill the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah: *"Until the land has retrieved its lost sabbaths, during all the time it lies waste it shall have rest while seventy years are fulfilled."*

This is a precursor and foreshadowing of the Coming of Christ. In the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, in his first year as King, the LORD called King Cyrus of Persia to issue this proclamation throughout his kingdom. *"The LORD, the God of heaven, has charged me to build him a house in Jerusalem... Whoever, therefore, among you belongs to any part of his Chosen People, let him go up, and may God be with him!"* It was through this *gift of God* that Cyrus released from captivity Nehemiah, a minor Old Testament prophet, and called him to supervise the rebuilding of the temple.

From Nehemiah 8:3 we hear *"...on the first day of the seventh month, Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women, as well as all those old enough to comprehend what was said... Ezra read from the book of the law in the presence of the Assembly of God. All present listened attentively to the book of the law."* Thus, Nehemiah instituted extensive moral and liturgical reforms in rededicating the Jews to Yahweh. This is the first instance in the bible of the word *Assembly of God*, which was translated in the New Testament as *"Ecu-mani,"* and the word *"Church."* Church is not brick and mortar but all those called and given purpose.

Today we expound on Christ's coming and the crisis it creates. All those who are called to *Assemble* and come to know him must decide to accept or reject him, and on that decision rests their eternal future. Those who accept him are saved, while those who reject him condemn themselves. God does not condemn them; they choose to stay in the darkness rather than accept the light of life, the Light of Christ.

*"For by grace you have been saved through faith,  
and this is not from you; it is the gift of God." Eph 2:9*

**A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to John**

Jesus said to Nicodemus:

“Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert,  
so must the Son of Man be lifted up,  
so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.”

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,  
so that everyone who believes in him might not perish  
but might have eternal life.

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world,  
but that the world might be saved through him.

Whoever believes in him will not be condemned,  
but whoever does not believe has already been condemned,  
because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

And this is the verdict,  
that the light came into the world,  
but people preferred darkness to light,  
because their works were evil.

For everyone who does wicked things hates the light  
and does not come toward the light,  
so that his works might not be exposed.

But whoever lives the truth comes to the light,  
so that his works may be clearly seen as done in God.

***The Gospel of the Lord***

