

## Fourth Sunday of Lent – March 14, 2021

**First Reading: 2 Chronicles 36:14-16, 19-23**

**Second Reading: Ephesians 2:4-10**



**Gospel: John 3:14-21**

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.

### SCRIPTURE REFLECTIONS

On this Fourth Sunday of Lent, we hear of God’s never-ending outreach of love for his people, for the world. We also hear of different outcome – different eternities – that await those who accept this love and those who reject it.... Those who act out of love and those who act out of evil.

The first reading speaks of Israel’s infidelities to God despite his “early and frequent” outreach to them. So lost in their own hard-hearted obstinacy, the nation suffers. The reading ends in hope – a new pagan king named Cyrus issues a decree permitting the exiles to return home and rebuild their city and temple. A gift from God from an unexpected source.

The beautiful verses of Paul call to mind God’s amazing mercy and grace, which raises us up from the death that comes through sin. Our salvation is pure gift. We can do nothing to earn it. But we can thank God for his saving grace by living lives filled with good works.

In the Gospel, Nicodemus, a Pharisee, sought out an encounter with Jesus. He came at night, fearful of being seen with Jesus. The nighttime, in John’s Gospel, symbolizes the spiritual darkness in which man lives apart from God. Nicodemus was a seeker, needing to come into the light and to awaken to the depth of God’s love and the gift of salvation he is offering – “God so loved the world.....”

Believing in Christ is a choice to live in the light. We can open our hearts to the light, or we can reject the light. The choice is ours.

## DISCUSSION

1. This Sunday's Gospel has John's famous 3:16 verse.
  - What has helped you to come to believe in God's unconditional love for you?
  - What in the past or present made it hard for you to believe in God's unconditional love?
  - Do you still act as if you have to earn your salvation?
  
2. Nicodemus comes to see Jesus at night so that his colleagues would not know of his interest in Christ. A decisive direction was presented to Nicodemus by Jesus. Yet John does not tell us here what reaction Nicodemus had to the words of Jesus - he seems to have silently disappeared back into the night. Nicodemus, in a certain way, is each of us.
  - We have met Jesus, we have sat at his feet, and we have heard his words. What do we do? Many Catholics are very quiet about their faith.
  - What has or is helping you to be more public about your Catholic faith?
  
3. God's love is also at the heart of **Laudato Si'**. Pope Francis asks us to "collaborate" with God in loving the world – everyone and everything – with goodness. How do Christians have a calling – and even a duty to this? What first steps come to mind as your response? What would be your hope for the change you can bring? [Ch. 6, P211-215]

p212. **We must not think that these efforts are not going to change the world. They benefit society, often unbeknown to us, for they call forth a goodness which, albeit unseen, inevitably tends to spread. Furthermore, such actions can restore our sense of self-esteem; they can enable us to live more fully and to feel that life on earth is worthwhile.**

**LENT REVIEW:** *This is Laetare Sunday - Laetare* means "rejoice" in Latin. As similarly with the Third Sunday of Advent's Gaudete Sunday, this week the Church expresses hope and joy in the midst of our Lenten fasts and penances. Call it pink — or, more fittingly, rose — this change in color indicates a glimpse of the joy that awaits us at Easter, just before we enter into the somber days of Passiontide.

- Where are you in the path to Easter joy?
- What are you working on this Lent? Awakening .... blind to seeing; deaf to hearing; asleep to awake, etc.? How is that going?

## **PRAYER FOR LENT**

Loving God, Open our eyes to see You  
and our ears to hear You during this season of conversion.  
Help us to renew our faith, draw from the living water of hope,  
and awaken our hearts to the love of Jesus Christ, Your Son.  
Amen.

*Adapted from Ascension Catholic, USCCB, Laudato Si'*