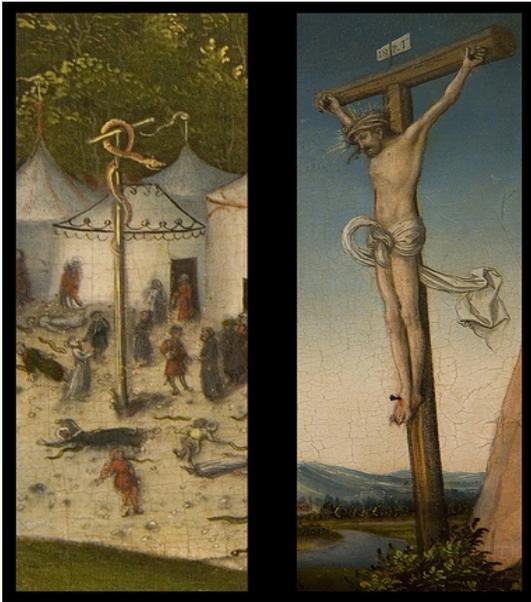


Lectionary Faith-Sharing Community

**4TH SUNDAY OF LENT**

Cycle B - March 14, 2021

**OPENING PRAYER**



Guide: *Your ways, O Lord, are love and truth to those who keep your covenant.*

All: **Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God, my savior.**

Leader: Remember that your compassion, O Lord, and your love are from old.

All: **In your kindness remember me, because of your goodness, O Lord.**

Guide: *We invoke the presence of the Holy Spirit:*

**Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send, Lord your spirit and renew the face of the earth.**

**Oh God, that you have instructed the hearts of your faithful with the light of the Holy Spirit, grant us through the same spirit that always enjoy her divine consolation. By Christ, our Lord. Amen.**

**FIRST READING** [ 2 Chronicles 36 (14-16), (19-23) ]

***In those days, all the princes of Judah, the priests, and the people added infidelity to infidelity, practicing all the abominations of the nations and polluting the Lord's temple which he had consecrated in Jerusalem.***

***Early and often did the Lord, the God of their fathers, send his messengers to them, for he had compassion on his people and his dwelling place. But they mocked the messengers of God, despised his warnings, and scoffed at his prophets, until the anger of the Lord against his people was so inflamed that there was no remedy. Their enemies burnt the house of God, tore down the walls of Jerusalem, set all its palaces afire, and destroyed all its precious objects. Those who escaped the sword were carried captive to Babylon, where they became servants of the king of the Chaldeans and his sons until the kingdom of the Persians came to power. 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."***

***In the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord inspired King Cyrus of Persia to issue this proclamation throughout his kingdom, both by word of mouth and in writing: "Thus says Cyrus, king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the Lord, the God of heaven, has given to me, and he has also charged me to build him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever, therefore, among you belongs to any part of his people, let him go up, and may his God be with him!"***

The two books of Chronicles summarize the history of the Israelite people during the turbulent years of the monarchy, the decline due to the separation between the Northern and Southern kingdoms, and the exile in Babylon, as well as the slow rebuilding of Judaism, once finished exile during the Persian period (5th and 4th centuries BC). The authors narrate this story from a priestly perspective, trying to present a teaching based on lived experiences.

In other times, the people, turning away from God, fell into idolatry and injustice, and that is why all kinds of bad things have rained down on them. In reality Israel should be a holy people, since God dwells in their midst. For this reason, they should be willing to listen to the voice of his emissaries or spokesmen (prophets) to put God's advice into practice.

Let us remember that during this Lent we have been reviewing (in the first reading) the history of salvation: First we saw the covenant with Noah, then the covenant with Abraham, then we saw the covenant with Moses, and now we are contemplating this other episode of such history.

This is the most dramatic moment of it. The passage that is proclaimed reveals God's intention from the very beginning of his Plan of Salvation: God's love is above what his people do or do not do to deserve that love. On this occasion, for the love of God, the people managed to return to their land, rebuild the temple in Jerusalem and reestablish the social and religious life that had been interrupted a couple of generations ago. This time, King Cyrus of Persia, a pagan, is the instrument at the service of God's plan.

- (1) Do you think that God continues to send messengers in our time?
- (2) What kind of messages would we need in our time?
- (3) Do you consider yourself capable of serving as a bearer of God's message?
- (4) Try to remember someone who was rejected because of the message they were transmitting.

## SECOND READING [ Ephesians 2 (4-10) ]

### **Brothers and sisters:**

**God, who is rich in mercy, because of the great love he had for us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, brought us to life with Christ — by grace you have been saved —, raised us up with him, and seated us with him in the heavens in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from you; it is the gift of God; it is not from works, so no one may boast. For we are his handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for the good works that God has prepared in advance, that we should live in them.**

This passage deserves to be read by the lines. Stopping at every moment to reflect on each of his ideas. It is extremely profound and summarizes the central idea, which consists of the salvation that we have achieved only and solely thanks to the action of Jesus Christ. Paul is so convinced of what he writes that he speaks as if our resurrection is a fact already done: he does not question it, so he takes it for granted, even if we have to wait for it to occur.

## 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.**



In the Gospel of John we find several times Jesus conversing with some people to give us a message. This time the character is Nicodemus, a deeply religious man (he was a Pharisee) and a member of the ruling class of his community. To avoid being seen with Jesus, he meets him one night and from the outset he recognizes that he has come from God because no one has been able to perform the miraculous signs that have already been seen.

Jesus is dedicated to clarifying Nicodemus' questions, and one of the central themes is the new life that he has come to bring: It is necessary to be born again, to receive the life that comes from the Spirit of God. That is why Jesus Christ must be welcomed with faith.



When Moses was leading the pilgrim people through the desert, there was an episode in which due to the abundance of snakes, God told him to make a bronze snake and put it on a stick, so that if one of them was bitten, just by looking at that figure, would be saved from death. This was known to Nicodemus, and Jesus uses the interpretation as a foreshadowing of his crucifixion and his saving effect. Everyone who looks to Christ glorified on the cross with faith will receive eternal life.

We already read in the second reading that our own merits would not be enough to achieve salvation, and that Jesus' sacrifice was necessary to merit eternal life. Here we see an announcement of what God's love for humanity is. Life, the presence of Jesus in the midst of men, and his subsequent death and resurrection, are the fulfillment of God's saving plan. However, that offer is not mandatory, because although it may seem strange, there have always been fools who rejected such invitation. That is why they prefer to continue in evil and lies, that is, they remain in the dark. Jesus Christ is not the judge who comes to condemn, but the light who comes to illuminate. And whoever does not want to use that light, remains in darkness.

- (1) Compare yourself to Nicodemus. What is your response to "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son ..."?
- (2) List activities that humans prefer to do in the dark rather than in open light.
- (3) Why are those activities not done in the light?
- (4) Read John 19 (38-40). Nicodemus was a Pharisee, as was Saint Paul. For centuries it has been taught that the Pharisees were hypocrites. Were all the Pharisees bad? Is it fair to judge a group of people for the shortcomings of some of its members?
- (5) How do you feel when enemies of our Church say that all priests are sexual perverts? What would you think if within a certain time, the Christians of your parish were qualified in a derogatory way for the sin of some? What could we do to prevent this from happening?
- (6) Are we remembering that it is a time of penance? Do we have a feeling of compassion and offer concrete works of charity for the victims of the wars of these days? Are we praying for peace in the world? What other topic could be the center of our prayer as a Church?

### CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: *Lord of the day and night, of the beginning and of the end: At the closing of this meeting, once again we lift up our hearts to You, divine source of all life.*

All: **We thank you for the gifts you have bestowed on us. We thank you for the love expressed in companionship and understanding, mutual respect and shared ideas. We give you thanks for your holy power that will help us in our concerns that we have shared. For these and all the gifts that come from You, we give you thanks.**

Leader: *Lord hear our prayers* (attendees can propose their own needs of prayer)

All: **In the same way in which we have being blessed by your presence as we meet, we ask now to bless our safe return to our homes. May your holy blessing be over us + in the name of the Father ...**

Leader: *May the King of the eternal glory gather us together in His heavenly banquet. Amen.*