

Fourth Sunday of Lent

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.

Jn 3:14-21

The serpent elevated in the desert. What a strange sign. It seems like Moses is trying to rub it in, and God is helping him. After all, the serpents were brought there as God's response to the people's complaints. The people were complaining because they were tired of the journey that seemed to have no end. They were losing trust, both in Moses' leadership and in God's good will. They were slowly forgetting the miracles of Egypt and the Red Sea. Pain, the tediousness of the journey, and the apparent lack of any achievement were taking hold in their hearts. They were complaining. Wouldn't you?

The serpent elevated in the desert is much more sophisticated than it looks at first glance. The surprise starts with the very mechanics of healing: all it takes to be cured is to look at the bronze serpent. Yes, it has the shape of their sin, but it also brings this amazing fruit of complete healing. The recovery of health starts the slow process of rebuilding trust and hope. If we can start trusting Moses again, we will already be hoping in God as well.

I can see now why Jesus wanted to show this image to Nicodemus when he was explaining the coming of the Son of Man. The love of God hasn't changed. The same fatherly love that we can detect behind the bronze serpent, elevated above the people, will be much more clearly visible in the Son of the Father elevated on the cross. Yes, it is my sins that nailed him to that cross

and, yes, it is my heart that is broken because I wouldn't want him to suffer and I wouldn't want him to be there, especially when I am the reason.

It is this same heart, the heart of the sinner, my heart, that is being rebuilt in hope when I look at him. It must have been very difficult to find comfort and to raise your eyes from the wound afflicted by a serpent to the bronze statue in the distance. It is equally hard to believe that when I look at the cross with hope and love, it will not end with a vicious circle of self-blame or guilt. It is hard to believe that the encounter with the cross will lead me to the revelation of love like I've never seen before. Jesus wants to be seen on the cross, not as a passive-aggressive reminder of my sinfulness, but to show me how far God is ready to go with his love.

"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."

This is the way the light enters my darkness. When I attempt to live following that light, even in the smallest way, everything becomes clearer, brighter, and more real.

How could I not long for this light? How could I be afraid of seeing my life in its radiance? When Christ is lifted up on the cross, he wants me to raise my eyes to see him, and he wants me to realize that through his pain and humiliation shines the unchangeable force of the Father's love, which heals my wounds and enlightens my darkness.