

11th March 2018 (Fourth Sunday in Lent, Year B)

2 Chronicles 36:14-16,19-23; Psalm 136(137):1-6; Ephesians 2:4-10; John 3:14-21.

The Son of Man must be lifted up!

This Sunday's readings invite us to reflect once again on our faith relationship with God. The first reading from one of the historical books of the Old Testament, tells us that God gets involved in the life of his people never abandoning them, even if they refuse to worship him. In the book of the Chronicles we read that the people of God are allowed back into their country to build their temple and once again follow God's Law.

In the second reading Paul reminds us of God's great gift of salvation. We are aware of our sinfulness, depicted in a special way in the story of the sin of Adam and Eve and their act of disobedience to God. Just as he reached out to help his people in the Old Testament, God now reaches out to us through his Son Jesus, so that we are saved.

In the gospel reading we are invited to listen in onto a conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus, a secret admirer who comes to Jesus in the night. Jesus explains to Nicodemus, and to us, the greatness of God's love for us; he sent us his only Son! This Son did not come among us for a holiday, but in order to reveal to us the face of the Father and the extent of his love.

Because of the radical way Jesus preaches God's love and mercy, Jesus gets into trouble with the leaders of the Jewish people who want to put him away. Jesus could have easily avoided trouble by shutting up and going back to his carpenter's trade in Nazareth; but he wanted to show us that we need to trust ourselves into God's will. This led Jesus to be crucified.

At times we may wonder how a loving Father could allow his Son to die on the cross. The answer is that God did not intervene in order to show us the extent of his love. The gospel according to John from which we read this Sunday is in a special way the gospel of God's love for us. Jesus speaks compares his crucifixion to the bronze serpent Moses lifted up on a spear. At a time when the people of God in the desert were plagued by poisonous serpents, looking up at the bronze serpent was a means of salvation and healing. In the same way, when we look up with faith at Jesus on the cross, we are healed and share in his salvation.

Jesus hanging on the cross is already glorified. The Greek word translated as 'lifted up' can mean both 'lifted up physically' and 'exalted;' when Jesus is lifted up onto his cross he is exalted into his glory. We do not follow a defeated, but a glorified risen Lord!

As we continue our journey this Lent we are invited to look with faith at Jesus, God and man, born for us and crucified for us. We are invited in faith to participate in this great drama of God's mercy and love. Through the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus we have been saved; through our faith in Jesus, by believing in this mystery of Jesus, we participate fully in our salvation.

Lent is a time to repent, have a change of heart and turn back to God in faith. Faith is a deep personal relationship with God. Do I accept this invitation, so that on Easter Sunday I can renew my commitment to faith in God?

Fr Mario