

# FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

March 13, 1994

2 Chronicles 36:14-17, 19-23

All the leading priests and the people also were exceedingly unfaithful, following all the abominations of the nations; and they polluted the house of the Lord that he had consecrated in Jerusalem. The Lord, the God of their ancestors, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place; but they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words, and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord against his people became so great that there was no remedy. Therefore he brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their youths with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or young woman, the aged or the feeble; he gave them all into his hand.

They burned the house of God, broke down the wall of Jerusalem, burned all its palaces with fire, and destroyed all its precious vessels. He took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had made up for its sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept sabbath, to fulfill seventy years. In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, in fulfillment of the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord stirred up the spirit of King Cyrus of Persia so that he sent a herald throughout all his kingdom and also declared in a written edict: "Thus says King Cyrus of Persia: The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the Lord his God be with him! Let him go up."

Ephesians 2:4-10

God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

John 3:14-21

Jesus said to Nicodemus: "Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever 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 may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God."

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you have certain convictions of which you are hesitant to speak? Name them. Give a reason for your hesitancy.
2. Who are the people who bring the light of Christ into the world today? In what ways has Jesus/Christianity brought light into the world?
3. What areas of our political/national life, both good and evil, would benefit from being "brought into the light?"
4. Pope Paul VI said, "If you want peace, work for justice." How does light bring justice -- and justice bring peace?

Karen Neuser □

# Salvation comes from God's love

## THE GOOD NEWS

GOD'S WORD IN EVERYDAY LIVING

By Father Paul Turner



Note: We offer again this week the readings for cycle B. However, if your community is celebrating the scrutiny rites with catechumens this weekend, you'll hear the story of the man born blind, John 9:1-41, from cycle A.

CAN YOU IMAGINE any other line of Scripture more beautiful than this one? "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

Maybe you tire of seeing John 3:16 written on everything from bumper stickers to billboards, and from stadium fan-held signs to tattoos. But when you finally look up the verse it's hard to deny its power and beauty.

This text comes up on a day we used to call "Laetare Sunday." The liturgy officially designates not only Scripture readings for each day, but texts for antiphons (or music) for the entrance and communion rites of Mass. The entrance antiphon for this Sunday is the same as it has been for centuries: "Laetare Ierusalem: et conventum facite omnes qui diligitis eam..." Taken from Isaiah 66:10-11, it means, "Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all of you who love her..."

At face value it offers a heartening message to Jerusalem which will see salvation come Easter day. But this rollickingly upbeat passage also prompted those fasting and doing penance for six weeks to cheer up. They were halfway home! Christ our light is the light at the end of the tunnel.

The liturgy still permits us to wear those rose colored vestments instead of purple on this day. Not the same spirit of celebration you get from, say, a Caribbean cruise, but you get the idea. After all, it's Lent.

Still, if ever a Gospel called for celebration it's this one.

THE THIRD CHAPTER of John eavesdrops on a conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus. The whole dialogue takes place at night and permits Jesus to introduce the role of the Spirit and the promise of new birth.

The opening verses of Sunday's passage (14-15)

compare Jesus to a serpent in the wilderness, contrasting with the cuddly Jesus of most liturgical art. John resurrects the story where Moses curbs desert snake bites by making a copper serpent on a pole. The sick who look at the serpent are cured. The Book of Wisdom also recalls this incident (16:5-7) as a tribute to God's role as savior. The image of the serpent on a pole strikingly foreshadows the role of Jesus on the cross. Those sick with sin who gaze upon the cross find redemption and healing.

Then Jesus interprets the conversation to explain the role of the Son. God sent the Son not for condemnation, but for salvation. This role will reveal the meaning of Easter. The passage implies that the human race receives the Son of God as a divine game of the lady or the tiger. People still wonder about God: condemning judge or loving redeemer? We have to be told that God's purpose is salvation.

What makes this passage so breathtaking is the reason it gives for this saving mission of the Son. (It should be obvious, but sometimes we need to hear the obvious.) It's because God loved us.

TOO OFTEN we focus the message of salvation on our response. Have we loved God? Have we loved our neighbor? But salvation comes not because of our love. It comes from God's love. The first letter of John spells it out more clearly (4:10). "In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins." Christians smugly take pride in our record -- we go to church, we participate at Mass, we abstain from meat on the Fridays of Lent, we even read *The Catholic Key*. But all that's just beans. We're not earning God's love. God loved us first.

How deeply did God love us? Enough to send the Son into the world to have the Son experience death -- no, conquer death. John describes Jesus here as God's "only son." John's interest, very likely lies not in birth certificates, but in the memory of Abraham who loved his "only son," Isaac, but was still ready to sacrifice him. That's love.

Only this realization will help us fully appreciate the mystery of the cross. Good Friday should fill us with the experience of being loved. From that wonderment we respond in love.

What are some of your favorite memories of being loved? What's it like to be loved first? Does it make you want to do something? For what reason? Duty or love?

How does the Church's teaching regarding marriage and family remain faithful to this passage? In what way is marriage a "sacrament" or sign of God's love?

Father Paul Turner is pastor of St. John Francis, Regis Parish, Kansas City. □

## Daily Scripture Readings

### Third Sunday of Lent

Sunday, March 6

Exodus 20:1-17  
Psalms 19:8-11  
1 Corinthians 1:22-25  
John 2:13-25

### Monday, March 7

2 Kings 5:1-15  
Psalms 42:2-3; 43:3-4  
Luke 4:24-30

### Tuesday, March 8

Daniel 3:25, 34-43  
Psalms 25:4-9  
Matthew 18:21-35

### Wednesday, March 9

Deuteronomy 4:1, 5-9  
Psalms 147:12-13, 15-16, 19-20  
Matthew 5:17-19

### Thursday, March 10

Jeremiah 7:23-28  
Psalms 95:1-2, 6-9  
Luke 11:14-23

### Friday, March 11

Hosea 14:2-10  
Psalms 81:6-11, 14, 17  
Mark 12:28-34



### Saturday, March 12

Hosea 6:1-6  
Psalms 51:3-4, 18-21  
Luke 18:9-14

### Fourth Sunday of Lent

Sunday, March 13

2 Chronicles 36:14-17, 19-23  
Psalms 137:1-6  
Ephesians 2:4-10  
John 3:14-21