

Father Ed's Homily

4th Week of Lent

Theme: "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"- John 3:14-15

In order to understand this saying of Jesus in John 3: 1-15, we have to read the Book of Numbers 21:4-9. In these verses, we read of one of the experiences of the Jews in the desert on their way to the Promised Land.

Some of them lost their patience and complained against God and Moses when they started having some challenges in the desert. They claimed they preferred to be slaves in Egypt to dying in the desert. Because of their ingratitude and lack of faith in God who is bringing them to the Promised Land, God allowed them to be bitten by serpents which killed many of them. When they admitted their sins against God and Moses and asked for God's forgiveness, God asked Moses to make a bronze serpent and mount it on a pole. Anyone who is bitten by the serpent and looks at the bronze serpent will recover and live.

Moses did exactly what God told him and all those who were bitten by serpents and looked at the bronze serpent were saved. Just as those bitten by the serpents were saved by looking at the bronze serpent on the pole, so also anyone who has faith in Jesus Christ and looks up to him on the Holy Cross will be saved and have eternal life.

During the Stations of the Cross on Friday, the Church reminds us how we're saved through Jesus' death on the holy cross with this beautiful prayer: "We adore you, O Christ and we bless you. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world." The bronze serpent only gave the ancient Jews temporal life, but for us Christians, Jesus' Cross gives us eternal life. The Crucifix, as I said last week in my homily, reminds us of the unconditional love God gave us by allowing His only beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to die for our salvation. This Crucifix again always reminds us of Christ's triumph over Satan and our redemption for his heavenly Father. This salvation Christ has won for us, as St. Paul tells us in the second reading, is God's precious free gift to us. We do not merit it. It does not depend on our good works.

Our Salvation in God is based on his unconditional love for us. Difficult to understand this? You are right! But it is the true teaching of our holy Roman Catholic Church. The Church believes and teaches that no one merits God's salvation. It is His free gift to us. All that God asks of us is to repent and believe in him and his only beloved Son, Jesus Christ, and we will be saved and have eternal life. St. John is known to use a lot of images to help his early Christian community and future Christians to understand this unconditional love of God and his salvation for us. For instance, John uses "Light" to stand for truth and goodness and "Darkness" for the bad, evil one. In today's Gospel, John tells us those who live by the truth will come to the light. They are not afraid of the light because their deeds are good. They're the true children of God. Those who hate the light will walk in darkness, meaning their works are evil.

In the first reading, we read about what the infidelity of the ancient Jews did to them. Due to the infidelity of the people of Judah, God allowed them to go into Babylonian exile. While they were in Babylon, they learned to appreciate God's love for them, hence repented from their sins. Their infidelity did not stop God from loving them. We know God loves us unconditionally but hates sins. So through the mercy and love of God, he brought them back home to Jerusalem. Our God is very merciful and loving, always forgiving us our sins when we turn back to him. As we reflect on this infidelity of the people of Judah, let us also examine our life and ask: are we faithful to our baptismal promises? The Season of Lent, as we know, offers us a great opportunity to turn to the Lord through prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Through the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession), God forgives us our sins, and we are once again reconciled with Him. This Monday, March 11, we will have our Lenten Penance Service at 7pm in our Parish and, on Tuesday, March 12, at Brendan Parish, Elkins at 6pm.

We are more than halfway through our 40-day journey with our Lord Jesus in the desert. How far are you on this spiritual journey? How are you doing with regard to Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving, the three traditional pillars of Lent? It is my prayer and hope that we will all have fruitful 40-day desert experience with Jesus so that we will have a grace-filled Easter.