



LIVING THE GOSPEL



**Fourth Sunday of Lent
March 10, 2018**

Theme: "...the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light."

Gathering Prayer

All: O God, who through your Word reconcile the human race to yourself in a wonderful way, grant, we pray, that with prompt devotion and eager faith the Christian people may hasten toward the solemn celebrations to come. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Exploring the Word

Gospel Reading: John 3:14-21

¹⁴ "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ He who believes in him is not condemned; he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹ And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ For every one who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.

²¹ But he who does what is true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been wrought in God.

Gospel Focus

We may feel tempted to distance ourselves from the people to whom Jesus refers when he talks to Nicodemus. Surely we would choose light over darkness, given the choice. But think about the experience of emerging from darkness to light-when we are not accustomed to it, the light is painful and blinding. A more gradual approach might help, but Jesus does not promise to progress us to holiness only insofar as we are comfortable. Jesus only is what he is, and he is light-pure and radiant. This light can seem blinding at first, confusing us as we strive to turn more fully toward a life of faith. But as our eyes grow used to the brilliance, it enables us to travel farther and faster than we ever could without it.

Gospel Reflection

In today's gospel the image of light and darkness is central to Jesus teaching. Coming to the light is presented as a conscious choice, one that can be difficult to make. Some people "preferred darkness." Jesus contrasted those who do wicked things. Who shun the light, with those who live the truth, who come to the light so that their works "may be clearly seen as done in God." The gospel paints the two in stark opposition, seeming to leave no space in between: we are either doing wicked things in the darkness or living the truth in the light. Yet our experience is that we all do wicked things that we want to hide, while at the same time we carry that spark of divine light that urges us toward truth.

Just as Earth gradually comes into full light between its turn at the spring equinox and the summer solstice, so our coming to the Light is a gradual process. That is how it is for Nicodemus. He first meets Jesus in darkness, taking an initial, tentative step toward the Light. But by the end of John 3, he is still not ready to commit himself fully to Jesus. He reappears in John 7:50-51, where he tentatively defends Jesus before his fellow religious leaders who are looking to arrest Jesus. Finally, at the end of the gospel, he comes with Joseph of Arimathea, bringing a hundred pounds of spices for Jesus burial (19:39)-a truly grandiose expression of his definitive choice to come to the Light.

Whatever fears keep us from coming to the Light can be allayed by the mercy and compassion to be found there. All of today's readings stress God's mercy and compassion, the great love, kindness and grace extended to us in Christ. He lifts us up from whatever darkness holds us bound. To Nicodemus, Jesus recalls the time when the Israelites were bitten by poisonous snakes in the desert and Moses fashioned a bronze serpent on a pole; whenever people were bitten, they looked upon and lived (Num 21:8-9). In the same way, whenever we look at the battered body of Jesus raised up on the cross, he helps us to overcome our fears of violence and death, or of anything that the darkness hides, as not only he but all of us are raised up with him (Eph 2:6) in God's light.

It is for life eternal, which we can already taste now, that the Light has come not for condemnation. The famous verse, John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son," stresses God's love, not God's wish to condemn anyone. The "world" is the special object of God's love and the arena in which we respond to the offer of divine love. The giving of the Son is not handing him over to death but rather the giving of him to us as Light incarnate. Refusal of the gift is choosing darkness that brings condemnation. Acceptance of the gift draws us into deepening faith as we choose again and again to live into the Light.

Old/New Testament and CCC links

First Reading — 2 Chronicles 36:14-16, 19-23

¹⁴ All the leading priests and the people likewise were exceedingly unfaithful, following all the abominations of the nations; and they polluted the house of the LORD which he had hallowed in Jerusalem.

¹⁵ The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place; ¹⁶ but they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words, and scoffing at his prophets, till the wrath of the LORD rose against his people, till there was no remedy. ...

¹⁹ And they burned the house of God, and broke down the wall of Jerusalem, and burned all its palaces with fire, and destroyed all its precious vessels. ²⁰ 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,

²¹ to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.

²² Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing: ²³ "Thus says Cyrus king 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. "'What surprises you in these accounts of God's dealings with his people?

Responsorial Psalm — Ps 137:1-2, 3, 4-5, 6

R: Let my tongue be silenced, if I ever forget you!

By the streams of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion.
On the aspens of that land we hung up our harps. **(R)**

For there our captors asked of us the lyrics of our songs, and our despoilers urged us to be joyous: "Sing for us the songs of Zion!" **(R)**

How could we sing a song of the Lord in a foreign land?
If I forget you, Jerusalem, may my right hand be forgotten! **(R)**

May my tongue cleave to my palate if I remember you not,
if I place not Jerusalem ahead of my joy. **(R)**

Second Reading — Ephesians 2:4-10

⁴ But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶ and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God— ⁹ not because of works, lest any man should boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Catechism of The Catholic Church

432. The name "Jesus" signifies that the very name of God is present in the person of his Son, made man for the universal and definitive redemption from sins. It is the divine name that alone brings salvation, and henceforth all can invoke his name, for Jesus united himself to all men through his Incarnation, (Cf. Jn 3:18; Acts 2:21; 5:41; 3 Jn 7; Rom 10:6-13) so that "there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12; cf. 9:14; Jas 2:7)

454. The title "Son of God" signifies the unique and eternal relationship of Jesus Christ to God his Father: he is the only Son of the Father (cf. Jn 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18); he is God himself (cf. Jn 1:1). To be a Christian, one must believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (cf. Acts 8:37; 1 Jn 2:23).

458. The Word became flesh so *that thus we might know God's love*: "In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him."(I Jn 4:9) "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."(Jn 3:16)

679. Christ is Lord of eternal life. Full right to pass definitive judgment on the works and hearts of men belongs to him as redeemer of the world. He "acquired" this right by his cross. The Father has given "all judgment to the Son".(Jn 5:22; cf. 5:27; Mt 25:31; Acts 10:42; 17:31; 2 Tim 4:1) Yet the Son did not come to judge, but to save and to give the life he has in himself.(Cf. Lk 21:12; Jn 15:19-20) By rejecting grace in this life, one already judges oneself, receives according to one's works, and can even condemn oneself for all eternity by rejecting the Spirit of love.(Cf. Jn 3:17; 5:26. 588 Cf. Jn 3:18; 12:48; Mt 12:32; I Cor 3:12-15; Heb 6:4-6; 10:26-31)

Sharing and Discussion

1. What does this passage communicate about the Father?
2. What synonyms would you provide for the expressions "believe in him," and "comes to the light"?
3. How does this passage describe the person who refuses the gift of salvation? What does it mean, to have received the gift of salvation?

Closing Prayer

All: Gracious God, you created humankind in your image to do good works in the world. Receive our prayers and strengthen our resolve to live as disciples of Christ in our communities. We offer this prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Leader: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life.

All: Amen