

Fourth Sunday of Lent B2021

I want to start this homily with a quotation from St Paul in his letter to the Ephesians we heard today as second reading: "God is rich in mercy. Because of the great love he had for us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, he brought us to life with Christ, (...) raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavens in Christ Jesus".

The truth of the mercy of God is asserted in the first reading of today through what God did for his people, Israel. The text says that in those days, all the princes, the priests and all the people added infidelity to infidelity before God, they practiced all the abominations of the nations and polluted the Lord's temple.

However, in spite of their infidelity, God in his bounty and mercy sent them messengers and prophets to warn them. But, they ignored them or killed them until the day their enemies invaded the country and destroyed the temple. Even though, God did not abandon them, but instead continued to care for them. In his love and compassion, He raised King Cyrus to help them return back home in the land of their ancestors and to rebuild the temple.

By doing so, God shows how merciful he is. Nothing will destroy his love for us. Even when we willingly choose to sin, he keeps hoping that we can come back to him. Even when we rebel against him, He is always at our search until he finds us again.

This episode of the Israelites saved from slavery by the bounty of God shows how those who do not listen to God warnings put themselves in difficult situation whose outcome is just trouble and misfortune. But, there is no prison or dark place that cannot be reached by God. No chains can resist the strength of his powerful love. He comes always back to our rescue and set us free.

The history of God's love for us is displayed in today's Gospel in such a way that we see very clearly how in the sending of Jesus into the world, God wanted to express the abundance of his love for us. Therefore, the passion and the death of Jesus on the cross are the ultimate consecration of God's love for us, but through which we are saved from the final damnation.

Like the people of Israel who were saved from the biting of the snakes by gazing on the serpent of the bronze raised on the spot, so will all those who believe in Jesus Christ lifted on the cross. The death of Jesus on the cross is a grace that God has granted us for our salvation.

Then, we understand that what happened to the Israelites was a prefiguration of what will happen to us. Jesus refers to this event in order to show that it is the symbol of what is going to happen to him. He will also be lifted up on the cross, and all those who will look at him will be saved.

But, does this statement mean that just looking at the crucifix can save us or save anybody who keeps committing sins? Not at all. And it cannot be so. To look at Jesus raised up means to believe in him, that is, to accept the message that he addresses to each one of us from the cross and to live by it.

Through this act of total love, Jesus declares that the only way to fulfill our lives is to give it up in love, as he did. It is not by repeating with our mouth the words of the Creed that we are saved, but by conforming our life to the life of Christ, by using our life for the good and in the service of our sisters and brothers.

John tells us also that “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”.

In other words, God loves us so much that he does not judge us; whatever might be our past or present. The only thing he wants is that we change and be saved. In that perspective, it is clear that salvation comes only to those who have the courage to give up their present life as Christ did. If, on the contrary, one refuses to listen to Jesus and lives in a way that is contrary to the Gospel, he destroys his life and condemns himself to eternal death. It is not Christ who condemns us, but rather we condemn ourselves when we ignore him and his precepts.

That is why every one of our actions and options should be considered very seriously this season of Lent. Our actions and decisions yield consequences for eternity. In that context, the judgment is not something that will take place at the end of the world. It is today, now, at every moment that people choose to be saved by accepting Christ “lifted up” or are condemned by refusing to accept the cross.

How many times we have missed the opportunities to make peace with God and ourselves! How many times we have preferred darkness to the light of Christ! One would say that human history is repeatedly the same with its stubbornness and lack of openness to God’s grace, mingled with war, violence, injustice and discrimination.

And yet the mercy of God is always within our reach. His door is always open to those who are lost and are strayed. In Jesus Christ, God commits himself to save what he once created in his love. This commitment is not for a while, but endures forever. We cannot save us by ourselves; by ourselves we do not have the power to get out of our sinful situation.

But God, who is rich in love and mercy, comes to our rescue. In Jesus he wants to take us out of our sinful situation and raise us to a new life. Salvation does not come from our merits; it is a gratuitous gift from the Father. So nobody can boast of the good he finds in himself, and no one should despise those who have not yet opened up their heart to the grace of Christ.

However, let it be clear to each one of us that, though it is true that we cannot gain salvation through our own good works, it is also true that such good deeds are necessary as a response to the love God has for us. They are the signs that the grace of God has penetrated into our heart and is producing fruit.

May this time of Lent helps us to respond positively to the love of God shown in Jesus Christ. May we strive to have the eternal life that God has prepared for us from all eternity! We conform our lives to that of Jesus Christ crucified for us! God bless you all!

2 Chronicles 36: 14-16, 19-23; Ephesians 2: 4-10; John 3: 14-21



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