

Fourth Sunday of Lent – Cycle B

[Reading I: 2 Chr 36: 14-16, 19-23](#)

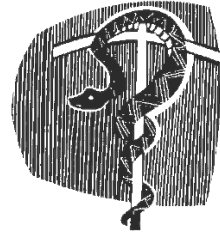
[Responsorial Psalm: 137:1-2, 3, 4-5, 6](#)

[Reading II: Ephesians 2: 4-10](#)

[Gospel: John 3:14-21](#)

Readings may be found on the US Bishop's website:

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/031024-YearB.cfm>



The Second Book of Chronicles was written after the Babylonian captivity (587 -537 BC) around the year 400 BC. The Exile had been the great tragedy of ancient Israel. They had lost their independence. The temple was destroyed, and Jerusalem was ransacked. Many people, young and old alike were killed. Those who were not killed were carried off to Babylon to be slaves. In Babylon, they mourned and wept over all that had been lost.

The priestly editor understood the exile to Babylon was the result of the lack of authentic worship in the pre-exile period. He views God's desire to save the people as manifest in the messages of the prophets who called the people to change their lives. Because the priests and the people did not respond to God's messages, they suffered. God did not wait for them to change and become obedient to the law. That did not happen yet, God loved them and in a merciful act, brought them back to Jerusalem through the conquest of Babylon by Persia.

Chronicles presents God as patient and desiring the return of Israel to a relationship with God. God did not abandon the people in Babylon but brought them back to renew the relationship, the Covenant relationship, that God had established with them. "I will be your God and you shall be my people."

The heart of the Gospel message in this passage from John reaffirms that it is God's will to save people and bring them into a relationship. Not only did God send messengers in ancient times but God has also sent Jesus to express his desire for relationship and bring salvation to all who will accept it.

The gospel passage offers part of the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus. Nicodemus is a Pharisee, a member of the party that stressed strict observance of the law as the means to be worthy of salvation. He comes to Jesus by night for he has not seen the light that Jesus is. He is searching in the darkness of his religious observance. He comes seeking something and Jesus tells him "That no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." Nicodemus misinterprets this to mean being physically born again. Jesus corrects this and says he must be born of "water and the Spirit." John is stressing the importance of the sacraments of Christian Initiation.

In the current passage, Jesus continues to explain to Nicodemus the mystery of God's plan. Jesus refers to the story in Numbers 21. The people complained to Moses that he had brought them out into the desert to die. Then serpents came and bit the people. They repented of their complaining and asked Moses to pray to God for relief. God commanded Moses to make a serpent and put it on a pole. Whoever looks at it will live. Jesus makes a double connection with how he will be lifted up on a cross and that he will be lifted up in the resurrection. Those who believe in the Son of Man will have eternal life. This applies not only to the Jewish community but to everyone from every land. Jesus is the savior of the whole of humanity. "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)

The harsh words for those who do not believe reflect the persecution believers are experiencing from both Jews and Romans at the time John is writing.

In the passage from Ephesians, the same message is presented. It is God's mercy that continues to reach out to us. God has great love for us even when we do not pay attention to God. God does not require humans to do great things but only to enter into a trusting relationship with God, a relationship of faith. Salvation is a gift, nothing that one can earn. Biblically faith is presented much more as a trusting reliance, as fidelity, rather than intellectual assent. The intellectual emphasis developed in the 1700s and 1800s when there was more attention to reason and intellect. In Ephesians, the emphasis is salvation is not the result of your efforts but God's gift. The question is do you trust Jesus to be the way to eternal life or will you try to achieve it on your own?

Themes

Salvation as a gift

God's unconditional love

Faith

Sacraments of Initiation

Reflection Questions

Has your religious upbringing suggested that you must earn God's love?

What role do good works play in your relationship with God?

How do you understand the work of sacraments in a person's life?

How do you understand faith?

Prayer Suggestions

For the Church: that we may continue to grow in our relationship with Christ and manifest God's unbounded love for the human family by our deeds of light

For the grace of transformation: that God will lead us from the comfort of darkness and selfishness and enable us to live in freedom as children of the light

For all who fear drawing close to God: that the Spirit will free their hearts from fear and lead them into an experience of God's love for them

For freedom of spirit: that we may surrender our desire to save ourselves and allow God to heal us and raise us to new life

For a greater realization of God's goodness: that we may recognize everything as a gift from God and open our hearts to accept the additional gifts that God has for us