

HOM 4th Sunday Lent 2024 B Mar 10

Early in their exodus journey from Egypt to the Promised Land of Canaan, the Israelites began to complain against Moses for the lack of food, water, and other provisions. In punishment, God then allowed a nest of snakes – saraph serpents, meaning fiery serpents – to attack them. Their bites were extremely painful and even deadly.

The Lord then told Moses to make a bronze serpent and to mount it on a pole and have the people look at it. When they did, they were healed. It was a way of enlightening and admonishing them -- as if to say: *“Remember the serpent on the Tree in the Garden and the disobedience of Adam and Eve and the consequences of their disobedience. Repent of your own rebelliousness and you will be healed.”*

In today’s Gospel reading, Jesus refers to that event and compares it to His crucifixion about which He says: *The Son of Man must be lifted up on a Cross – crucified -- so that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life.*

Now, to believe that Jesus Christ Crucified is God is to believe in the love God has for humanity and for each us. It is also to know the response we need to make to God’s love order to have eternal life with Him. That’s because the Crucified One is both Son of God extending God’s merciful love to us, and Son of Man, showing us the way to oneness with God who is Life itself: *we are to love God by obeying His will as Jesus did, which unites us to Him.*

The Gospel writer, John, today proclaims that God so loves the world that He gave His only Son unto the Cross...as light i.e., so that we can see the way to eternal life...but people preferred darkness. The Son of Man was lifted up, obedient to the Father, and offering Himself in love for us and to us in the Most Blessed Sacrament so that, by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit first of all in the sacraments, we can all join Him in His oblation of obedience and love and so gain eternal life. But many people prefer darkness. They reject the light. They turn away from it. They want something else instead of, or more than, oneness with God. This leads to eternal darkness. Hell. The world has constructed a super highway to get there.

Today’s first reading recounts the sins of God’s People continuing in the Promised Land and leading up to another punishment known as the Babylonian Exile. It lasted from 597 BC when the Chaldeans, under King Nebuchadnezzar, destroyed Solomon’s Temple and all of Jerusalem, and led the Jews into exiled servitude until to 542 BC – 55 years -- when the Persian King Cyrus, having conquered Babylon, invited the Jewish People to return to their homeland. He even gave them merciful aid. Yet only about a quarter of the people returned.

This remnant faced the daunting task of rebuilding their city, the Temple, their businesses, their homes and their lives. When the Greeks took over around 150 BC, and attempted to wipe out the practice of the Jewish faith, it was another remnant of Jews that resisted and remained faithful to their Covenant with the Lord. When the Romans took over in 63 BC, still another remnant of Jews centered their lives on hoping and praying for the Promised Messiah to come soon. Simeon and Anna are examples of this, along with the Blessed Virgin Mary.

It seems its always the remnant that accepts God’s mercy and seeks to remain faithful to His covenant with Man – in our case it is the New and Everlasting Covenant in the Sacrament of His Body and Blood. And it is always the remnant that is asked by the Lord to extend His mercy to others – even to the many who prefer to live in darkness and the shadow of death.

Today's darkness is ominous. Abortion, euthanasia, pornography, child trafficking, same sex marriage, transgenderism, increasing lawlessness, the growing persecution of Christians worldwide, war and the threat of greater war, secularism, relativism, an expanding culture of death. Yet the remnant of the faithful is expected to remain steadfast, even to become witnesses to the Gospel truth for the sake of others, and to be volunteer victims for the salvation of all the willing.

Yes, God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, who in turn – in offering Himself -- gave His Mystical Body, the Church – you and me -- unto the Cross of obedience and love so that all will believe in Him and will not perish. Brothers and sisters, this is why we are here today. This is our purpose.

Who does not have or know people who have abandoned the practice of the faith or never had it – family, friends, or those we have encountered somewhere or have heard about or read about or seen on television? God loves them all. And wants them to know and love Him and to share in His eternal blessedness. And He wants us to facilitate this: to do or to speak or to suffer whatever He asks of us for them – to offer ourselves to Him in Holy Communion and with Him to the Father unto the Cross for them and so communicate to them the Holy Spirit which will make their turning to Him possible.

I call this Eucharistic Self-Offering. The Second Vatican Council gave all pastors a mandate to practice, teach, and promote it as part of their duty to bring about full, conscious, and active participation in the Mass. Eucharistic Self-Offering is, in fact, the necessary pinnacle for full participation in the Mass.

Does anyone take it seriously? I do. I hope you will. Pope Benedict XVI taught that if all the faithful did it, it would usher in the new heavens and the new earth! Leading up to this, the Mystical Body of Christ would grow toward full stature in the likeness of Christ. His Bride would become ready for the Eternal Wedding Celebration.

What is OUR response? Is it ho-hum? Or is it: I AM ALL YOURS O MOST LOVING JESUS THROUGH MARY YOUR MOTHER WITH THE HELP OF ST. JOSEPH for the temporal good and most especially the eternal good – the sanctification and salvation – of my family and friends and everybody I know, including those I don't particularly like?

I invite you to pray those words silently and sincerely with every Holy Communion and to strive to live them out in-between. This will lead to your praising and thanking God every day unto eternal life. Every day will be a day to LATARE – REJOICE -- in the Lord.