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FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT (B)

My Dear Brothers and Sisters, we have been told twice in the past two days - that we are right now in the middle of Lent, so today we are right now we are a little past the middle of this holy season, this Fourth Sunday of Lent, "Laetare Sunday"! Laetare, Rejoice! This 4th Sunday is always about rejoicing. We rejoice, not only because we have made it halfway through Lent, but because the Lord continues to call us his people and to draw us to himself.

The Readings today make us very aware that we are still sinful humans, called to grow in faithfulness and love. We might wonder what the relevance the First Reading (2 Chron.) might be to Lent or even today's Gospel. (There is usually some link between the First Reading and the Gospel.) Due to the sins of the Jewish people, from the priests down (or up), because of the idolatry and other sacrilegious practices after God had sent them messenger after messenger were not listened to, a terrible punishment fell on the whole people. That was how the sacred writer understands the destruction of the Temple and the whole city of Jerusalem and the survivors being carried into exile by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylonia. Many years later, Cyrus, the King of Persia, became the agent of God by which God's people were once more able to return to Jerusalem and begin to rebuild their traditions and a new Temple.

The Second Reading (Eph.) speaks again about our human failings and God's mercy. "God" even when we were dead in our transgressions, brought us to life with Christ. It is the gift of God

The Gospel has a parallel theme with the First Reading, but in a much higher level. Jesus, the Son of God, becomes the agent of God's salvation, not for one sinful people but for the sinfulness of the whole world. So, today, we are coming closer to the celebration of how that salvation was brought about.

This Gospel makes a comparison with Moses, who was also an agent of God and a savior of God's people. At God's instruction Moses had raised up a bronze serpent on a pole. John sees here a foretype of Jesus being 'lifted up'. For John Jesus' being 'lifted up' includes both his being raised up on a cross and being raised up to be with his Father in glory. In the process we were saved, healed and made whole. ..All those who look to Jesus in faith will be saved, will be given "eternal life", a life that can never be taken away.

Today's Gospel also explains the true relationship between our sin and God's judgement, with the unambiguous declaration by Jesus that "God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him". God's "judgement" is not a separate act, but consists in the very fact that "the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil." Whoever lives the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be clearly seen as done in God.

All of this is a sign of God's own love. God sacrificed his only Son so that we might have eternal life. John emphasizes that God sent his Son to save and not to judge or condemn. In fact, no one who puts their whole self in God's hands through faith can be condemned. It is never too late to make that step of faith.

It's never too late! Yes, Lent is over half over, this time of healing and reconciliation. Which brings to mind the sacrament of Reconciliation. The next time you hear the confessor say the Prayer just before the Absolution, notice how the words beautifully sum up Lent, Easter and Pentecost: "God the father of mercies, through the Death and Resurrection of his Son, has reconciled the world to himself - and sent the Holy Spirit into the world - for the forgiveness of sins! That's what it was, and is - all about!

Thanks be to God!

((2 Chr 36:14-16, 19-23, Eph 2:4-10, John 3:14-21))

f. Alan