

GOSPEL

JOHN 3:16-18

Jesus said to Nicodemus, 'God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost but may have eternal life.

For God sent his Son into the world not to condemn the world, but so that through him the world might be saved.

No one who believes in him will be condemned; but whoever refuses to believe is condemned already, because he has refused to believe in the name of God's only Son.'

A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

The Bible readings for this Sunday, feast of the Most Holy Trinity, helps us to enter into the identity of God. The second reading presents the departing words that Saint Paul bids to the community of Corinth: "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all of you" (2 Cor 13:13). This — as we say — "blessing" of the Apostle is the fruit of his personal experience with God's love, that love which the Risen Christ revealed to him, which transformed his life and "impelled" him to take the Gospel to the peoples. Beginning from his experience of grace, Paul could exhort Christians with these words: "... rejoice. Mend your ways, encourage one another, agree with one another". The Christian community, even with all its human limitations, can become a reflection of the communion of the Trinity, of its kindness, of its beauty. But this — just as Paul himself testifies — necessarily passes through the experience of God's mercy, of his forgiveness.

It is what happens to the Hebrews in the Exodus journey. When the people break the covenant, God presents himself to Moses in the cloud in order to renew that pact, proclaiming his own name and its meaning. Thus he says: "the Lord, a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger and rich in kindness and fidelity" (Ex 34:6). This name implies that God is not distant and closed

within himself, but is Life which seeks to be communicated, is openness, is Love which redeems man of his infidelity. God is "merciful", "gracious" and "rich in charity" because he offers himself to us so as to fill the gap of our limitations and our shortcomings, to forgive our mistakes, to lead us back to the path of justice and truth. This revelation of God is fulfilled in the New Testament thanks to the Word of Christ and to his mission of salvation. Jesus made manifest the face of God, in substance One and in persons Triune; God is all and only Love, in a subsistent relationship that creates, redeems and sanctifies all: Father and Son and Holy Spirit.

Today's Gospel "sets the stage" for Nicodemus, who, while playing an important role in the religious and civil community of the time, has not ceased seeking God. He did not think: "I have arrived"; he did not cease seeking God; and now he has perceived the echo of His voice in Jesus.

In the nighttime dialogue with the Nazarene, Nicodemus finally understood that he had already been sought and awaited by God, that he was personally loved by Him. God always seeks us first, awaits us first, loves us first. He is like the flower of the almond tree; thus says the Prophet: "It blooms first" (cf. Jer 1:11-12). In fact Jesus speaks to him in this way: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life" (Jn 3:16).

What is this eternal life? It is the immeasurable and freely given love of the Father which Jesus gave on the Cross, offering his life for our salvation. And this love with the action of the Holy Spirit has shined a new light on the earth and into every human heart that welcomes him; a light that reveals the dark corners, the hardships that impede us from bearing the good fruits of charity and of mercy.

May the Virgin Mary help us to enter ever deeper, with our whole being, into the Trinitary Communion, so as to live and witness to the love that gives meaning to our existence.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 'God loved the world so much' – the Father, through the Son and in the Holy Spirit desires to be in close intimate relationship with you! How does this make you feel?
- 'No one who believes in him will be condemned' – how does this statement make you feel when you consider those times that make you feel most ashamed?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.