

**GOSPEL**
*John 3:14-21*

Jesus said to Nicodemus:

‘The Son of Man must be lifted up as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.

Yes, 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.

On these grounds is sentence pronounced: that though the light has come into the world men have shown they prefer darkness to the light because their deeds were evil.

And indeed, everybody who does wrong hates the light and avoids it, for fear his actions should be exposed; but the man who lives by the truth comes out into the light, so that it may be plainly seen that what he does is done in God.’

**A REFLECTION OF POPE FRANCES**
*14 March 2021*

On this fourth Sunday of Lent, the Eucharistic liturgy begins with this invitation: “Rejoice, Jerusalem...” (cf. Is 66:10). What is the reason for this joy? In the middle of Lent, what is the reason for this joy? Today’s Gospel tells us: 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). This joyful message is the heart of the Christian faith: God’s love found its summit in the gift of his Son to a weak and sinful humanity. He gave his Son to us, to all of us.

This is what appears in the nocturnal dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus, a part of which is described in the same Gospel passage (cf. Jn 3:14-21). Nicodemus, like every member of the people of Israel, awaited the Messiah, identifying him as a strong man

who would judge the world with power. Instead, Jesus challenges this expectation by presenting himself in three forms: the Son of man exalted on the cross; the Son of God sent into the world for salvation; and that of the light that distinguishes those who follow the truth from those who follow lies. Let us take a look at these three aspects: Son of man, Son of God, and light.

Jesus presents himself first of all as the Son of man (vv. 14-15). The text alludes to the account of the bronze serpent (cf. Num 21:4-9), which, by God’s will, was mounted by Moses in the desert when the people were attacked by poisonous snakes; whoever had been bitten and looked at the bronze serpent was healed. Similarly, Jesus was lifted up on the cross and those who believe in him are healed of sin and live.

The second aspect is that of the Son of God (Jn 3:16-18). God the Father loves humanity to the point of “giving” his Son: he gave him in the Incarnation and he gave him in handing him over to death. The purpose of God’s gift is the eternal life of every person: in fact, God sends his Son into the world not to condemn it, but so that the world that it might be saved through Jesus. Jesus’ mission is a mission of salvation, of salvation for everyone.

The third name that Jesus gives himself is “light” (vv. 19-21). The Gospel says: “the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light” (v. 19). The coming of Jesus into the world leads to a choice: whoever chooses darkness will face a judgment of condemnation; whoever chooses light will have a judgment of salvation. The judgement is always the consequence of the free choice of each person: whoever practices evil seeks the darkness; evil always hides, it covers itself. Whoever seeks the truth, that is, who practices what is good, comes to the light, illuminates the paths of life. Whoever walks in the light, whoever approaches the light, cannot but do good works. The light leads us to do good works. This is what we are called to do with greater dedication during Lent: to welcome the light into our conscience, to open our hearts to God’s infinite love, to his mercy full of tenderness and goodness, to his forgiveness.

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Do not forget that God always forgives, always, if we humbly ask for forgiveness. It is enough just to ask for forgiveness, and he forgives. In this way we will find true joy and will be able to rejoice in God's forgiveness, which regenerates and gives life.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/ Homily?



**Head:** Which of the three forms Jesus presents: Son of man, Son of God, or light, resonates most with you? Why?



**Heart:** Do you feel you have opened your heart to "God's infinite love, to his mercy full of tenderness and goodness, to his forgiveness"? What happened and how did you feel?



**Hands:** "Do not forget that God always forgives, always, if we humbly ask for forgiveness". Do you ever find it difficult to accept God's forgiveness? Why?

## 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. Offer 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 praying the 'Glory Be'.