

SUNDAY MARCH 11, 2018 – Fourth Sunday of Lent

We are in the fourth week of Lent, just past the halfway mark in this season of repentance and joy. Let us not waster this opportunity to hear God’s promises of love, healing and forgiveness.

This is the Good News proclaimed to all of us today; no matter how far we’ve stumbled or how far we’ve drifted, we can choose to return to the Lord – right now.

The rabbi Nicodemus was the only member of the Sanhedrin who came to Jesus in the night, and who tried defending Jesus in his circle. He also helped Joseph of Arimathea with Jesus’ burial.

Nicodemus wanted information about baptism and the means to achieve eternal life. Jesus responded with the analogy, “The Son of God will be lifted up as the serpent of Moses in the desert.”

Nicodemus understood the analogy because he was an expert in scripture. Then St. John comments, “Yes, God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son to save the world.”

On this fourth Sunday of Lent – halfway through Lent – Scripture emphasizes the call, “Be gracious, like the pagan King Cyrus, like God our Father and like Jesus Christ.”

Nehemiah speaks to the Jews about God’s graciousness to them. How the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed for years of sinfulness and idolatry and the Jews sent into exile in Babylon.

Now God used a pagan king, Cyrus, to rebuild the temple. Be happy for that and show your kindness to God. St. Paul talks of the grace of salvation. We depend completely on the grace of God. God is so generous in his love and mercy.

Be gracious to God every day. St. John shows us the great grace of the cross of Christ. His cross is a sign of salvation for us all. No one is excluded from his graciousness.

Francis Thomson wrote the book *The Hand of Heaven*, the story of his life. He tried to run away from God but God found him. As a boy, he had intended to be a priest but because of his laziness he let his father enroll him in medical school. The opium habit he acquired resulted in him becoming a beggar. Through the kindness of a poor girl, he met Mr. and Mrs. Wilfred Meynell who recognized his inner goodness and helped him discover God’s love. Nicodemus, Francis and others show us how much God loves us.

How can we get to know God’s love? God’s love for us is broad. It extends to every human being, to pagans, sinners and even to enemies. God’s love for us is from all eternity. God’s love for us is high. It reaches from the throne of heaven to earth in the sacraments and the Mass. God’s love for us is deep. He humbled himself from highest heaven to the lowly stable and the tomb.

So as we continue in this Lenten season, perhaps we can spend some time thinking about that. And in doing so, we might also reflect on what, in our own lives, demonstrates how much we love God in return.