

4TH SUNDAY OF LENT, B CYCLE, MARCH 15, 2015

First Reading: 2 Chronicles 36:14-16, 19-23 [the exile and liberation of God's people]

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 137 ["Let my tongue be silenced if I ever forget you"]

Second Reading: Ephesians 2:4-10 [You have been saved by grace]

Gospel: John 3:14-21 [God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so we might receive eternal life]

As I prayed over the Gospel for today, I kept hearing a song

♪ We remember how you loved us to your death, and still we celebrate, for you are with us here.
And we believe that we will see you when you come, in your glory, Lord.

WE REMEMBER, WE CELEBRATE, WE BELIEVE. ♪

The Scriptures and the prayers today invite us to remember the love of God, to celebrate the Good News Jesus brings and to live the faith we profess as his disciples.

Have you ever seen someone at a baseball or basketball game holding a sign that read: John 3:16? That is a reference to the words in today's Gospel reading. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but might receive eternal life."

They sound wonderful, don't they, but how are they good news in the midst of terrorist threats in the world, worries about money & health care in our nation and uncomfortable changes in the Church & the Parish? How are they good news in situations which are beyond our power to control or fix?

They are good news because they are a reminder of some basic truths of the faith we share as disciples of Christ.

First of all, they invite us to remember that God is still in control of the big picture. God's love is still the bottom line. Christ, by dying, has destroyed our death and by rising has restored our life.

But those truths invite us to make the same journey Jesus made, the same journey God's people made through the desert. The Gospel begins, "*Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up.*" [This refers to the time when the Israelites had been bitten by snakes and got sick, but recovered when they looked at the bronze serpent that Moses lifted up over them]

In many places in the Gospel, Jesus calls himself the Son of Man. The phrase in Hebrew literally means "the Human One," that is, the one who shows us how to be truly human, how to live as children of the same God he calls Father.

The words about the serpent and the Son of Man refer to the pain of crossing the desert and the pain of walking the way of the cross. But they also celebrate the healing the people experienced when they looked at the bronze serpent that Moses held up, and the joy of Christ being lifted up from death on Easter.

And that promise is not just for life everlasting after our bodies die, it is a promise of a new kind of life right here, right now. Eternal life does not just begin after death. [One of my Friar friends often says that he wonders if people find it easier to believe in life after death than in life before we die.] Eternal life means that Christ is present with us all through our life's journey.

How can we continue to walk through the hard times, the times when we feel like we have run out of energy, lost control?

That is when we need to remember, to celebrate and to believe.

We are called to **remember** that the Father so loved the world that he sent the Son to give us real life.

What does that mean for us? It means that we are called to **celebrate** our faith in the love of God. And this is more than coming to church on weekends. It is more than knowing in my head that Jesus is Lord.

We are called to **believe**. This faith is not just to believe in our heads that the words of the creed are true. To believe is not about **saying** I believe in Christ as my savior, it is about **living** day to day as if we believe so deeply in God's love that we are ready to trust God and pass that love on to each other.

To believe in the Biblical sense means to receive God's love as a grace, as a gift - as Paul writes in the second reading, *"by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from you; it is the gift of God... we are his handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for the good works that God has prepared in advance, that we should live in them."* It means to **live** the truth, as the Gospel for today says: "Whoever lives the truth comes to the light."

Cyrus, who was not a Jew but the pagan king of Persia, lived that kind of faith in the first reading because he lived the will of God. Some of my friends who do not call themselves Catholic or even Christian live the love of God better than I do sometimes.

Sr. Anna and I had a friend named Gary who professed to be an atheist. He was an environmental engineer and spent his life caring for the earth and the people who most needed the earth to be in balance. When he knew he was close to death, he asked us to lead his memorial service. At that service, several of his Christian friends said that Gary had lived the teaching of Jesus better than they did.

The words in the Gospel about being saved or condemned are more about how we live and love than about what we say we believe or what faith community we are part of.

As we walk through this Mass on this day in March, 2015, we are not alone. Christ is with us through the Scripture we have heard. He walks with us through each other to the extent that we live in love and truth. He comes into our hearts and bodies through the sacrament of his body and blood.

It is this grace of Christ that gives us the energy to live the truth and to love one another as we walk through the good times and the times of painful growth. It is this grace of the presence of Christ that gives us the power to remember, to celebrate and to live what we say we believe.

I invite you to join me in the song I began with. A song which puts our faith into words and sets it to music:

♪ We remember how you loved us to your death,
and still we celebrate, for you are with us here.

And we believe that we will see you
when you come, in your glory, Lord.

WE REMEMBER, WE CELEBRATE, WE BELIEVE. ♪