



Father Joseph's Outline for the Sunday before the Cross Homily

John (3:13-17) - Sunday 9/07/2008

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.” (John 3:16-17)

This statement is a direct link that connects the coming of the Christ and His crucifixion to the salvation of mankind, thus revealing the purpose of God’s plan for salvation.

This statement was part of Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus. He also said:

“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life.” (John 3:14-15)

Jesus here is talking about a story from the Old Testament that is recorded in the book of Numbers:

“And the people spoke against God and against Moses, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food.” Then the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. And the people came to Moses and said, “We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you. Pray to the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us.” So Moses prayed for the people. And the LORD said to Moses, “Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live.” So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.” (Numbers 21:4-9)

- By referring to this particular passage, Jesus wants to teach us that His death on the Cross was foretold in the Old Testament.
- Placing the bronze serpent on the pole was God's quiet way of foretelling to the people about the future sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross that was intended for the salvation of the world.
- The other lesson here is that the deadly sting of the snakes refers to the deadly effect of sins against our souls.
- By the same token, when Jesus was crucified, through His death victory came over death. *“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God” (1st Peter 3:18).*
- So, by lifting Jesus up on the cross, the “death of Death” was nailed on the Cross, just like the serpent was fixed and lifted up on the pole.

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- Looking at Jesus' death on the Cross brings eternal life to those who believe in Him in the same way that looking at Moses' serpent brought healing to people who were in danger of dying as they were bit by the deadly snakes.
- So, actually, by looking at the death of Christ on the cross we are looking at Life itself and we are granted life as well. Death was swallowed by the death of the Lord, and people have been enabled to obtain healing if they are bitten by the sting of sin and Satan.

This means that the cross is a sign of God's love toward His creation.

The cross is not what it might seem or be understood by some people as a sign of weakness or foolishness.

“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God...God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.” (1st Corinthians 1:18-23)

- It is of utmost importance for all Christians to understand the purpose of the Cross CLEARLY and to connect it to the purpose of the coming of Jesus Christ and His redeeming work in the world.
- Understanding how priceless the sacrifice of Christ on the cross is, and understanding that this is a sacrifice of love offered for the sake of all people, is a key component for a correct interpretation of Jesus' teaching and for living a healthy Christian life.

The cross has two dimensions. The vertical is understood to connect earth with heaven, and the horizontal is understood to show that, in such a way, God can embrace all humans with His open arms.

The effect of the cross on our life: embracing the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross brings newness to our lives.

“Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do— living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you. But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to men in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit.” (1st Peter 4:1-6)

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Prayer

O Lord Jesus Christ our God. You have come into the world for the salvation of mankind. We were healed by Your stripes. We have been granted forgiveness of our sins through Your sacrifice upon the cross. Make us worthy, O Lord, to embrace the new way of life that is acceptable in Your sight. May this happen through the divine grace of Your Eternal Father, who sent You for our salvation, and Your most loving Holy Spirit. Amen.

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