

March 14, 2021 – Fourth Sunday in Lent

Dear Parishioners:

God sometimes uses twists in doing his work. Especially in today's first reading and the Gospel, we can find some such twists.

From 597 to 582 B.C., the Israelites were taken captive to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king. God uses the Gentile king to strike the Israelites against their sins. But in today's first reading, God uses another Gentile, Cyrus, the Persian king, as His instrument in liberating the Israelites from their captivity. So, the first return of the Israelites took place in 538 B.C.

God did not raise judges or prophets to liberate the Israelites, as He had done before, rather He used another Gentile who did not even believe in Him. The reason is that he wanted to convey a special message to the people of Israel through this. "Don't forget that you sinned against me and that I punished you through the Gentiles. I did not choose you because you were holy. It is not because you live holy that you are freed, but because of the covenant I made with your ancestors and for the sake of my name and I had pity on you people. I can achieve my will through Gentiles other than you. So do not boast that you are the chosen people. I want you to live faithfully to me with a humble heart unlike your unfaithful ancestors" He reveals His power and divine glory by using the Gentiles whom He chose to punish the Israelites, now to liberate them. This, of course, can be seen as a foreshadowing that in the distant future countless Gentiles will reveal His glory through Jesus Christ.

The Gospel says, "Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert." This is a story from the book of Numbers (chapter 21: 4-9). The Israelites complained against God about the food He gave them. So, the Lord sent among the people seraph serpents, which bit the people so that many of the Israelites died. Then the people repented and asked Moses to pray to the Lord for them. So, Moses prayed for the people, and the Lord said to Moses: Make a seraph and mount it on a pole, and everyone who has been bitten will look at it and recover. Accordingly, Moses made a bronze serpent and mounted it on a pole, and whenever the serpent bit someone, the person looked at the bronze serpent and recovered. Just imagine that people who were bitten by the serpent had to

look at the bronze serpent. How traumatic it would have been to them! But the Lord chose the serpent to be mounted. Here, the Lord could have chosen other types of objects mounted instead of the serpent, but he did not do so because He wanted to reveal His power and glory by choosing the same type of object that had been used to punish the people as an instrument of healing. And by doing so, every time the Israelites looked at the bronze serpent, they were reminded of what they did wrong, how they were punished, and how mercifully the Lord treated them when they repented of their sin.

“The son of man must also be lifted up” (John 3:14). Likewise, Jesus shows people by being lifted up on the cross. What does He show? He shows that He suffered that for our sins. But He also shows that with infinite love and mercy, He paid the price for our sins. Humans have sinned through their humanity and continue to do so. Jesus paid the penalty for all sins committed by humans through His humanity. Through His passion and death, He shows so much love for humans. In doing so, he shows what humans can do with their humanity. It teaches us that although we can sin with it, but at the same time we can do much good with it out of love for God and for our neighbor. So, “God, who is rich in mercy..., in the ages to come, might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:4, 7). For “God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him” (John 3:17).

In this way, God bestows the grace of twists. Another good example would be that Jesus changed Saul, who persecuted His church, into the apostle Paul. “Everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come toward the light, so that his works might not be exposed. But whoever lives the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be clearly seen as done in God” (John 3:20-21). Within each of us, there are parts that want to go to the light. That’s why we do many good things. At the same time, there are parts that do not want to go to the light. When we reveal that our works are done in God, God is glorified through them. But the parts we hide in the dark, the parts that are shameful, ugly, and sinful, can give God greater glory if we repent. God uses those parts to offer the graces of twists. When things hidden in the dark go to the light through repentance, they become more visible to people

and cause even greater wonder to people. So, it becomes a greater glory to God who made that wonder possible.

Today is fourth Sunday of Lent. Lent is a time of penance, repentance, and conversion. Let the evils within us, the parts that do not want to go to the light, the parts we want to hide, go to the light through the grace of repentance so that we can show the conversion is done in God.

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