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Tuesday's Gospel: The Serpent and Christ's Cross

Gospel for Tuesday in the 2nd
Week of Easter, and
commentary.

Gospel (*Jn 3:7b-15*)

Jesus said to Nicodemus:

“You must be born anew. The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

Nicodemus said to him, “How can this be?”

Jesus answered him, “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand this? Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen; but you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the Son of man. And 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.”

Commentary

In continuity with yesterday's liturgy, today we are presented with the

second part of the conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus. Our Lord invites this influential Jew to abandon his old way of thinking and embrace his message about a new kind of life “according to the Spirit.” But Nicodemus finds these words so disconcerting that he asks: “How can this be?”

Jesus, perhaps with an ironical tone of voice, says it is strange that a “teacher of Israel” should be disconcerted by divine truths, which are supposed to be his responsibility. But he does not leave him in the dark and goes on to reveal a great mystery. In the first part of their conversation that we saw yesterday, Jesus made clear that this new Life would come about through the Holy Spirit (cf. *Jn* 3:5). Now he tells him that this Life will be given to us through Jesus himself.

To explain this, Jesus points to the story of Moses and the bronze serpent (cf. *Num* 21:4-9). He reminds Nicodemus of the people of Israel wandering in the desert who began to long for their days in Egypt and to curse God and Moses for their difficult situation. In punishment for their ingratitude, God sent poisonous snakes that bit and killed many of them. But Moses interceded for the people before the Lord, who told him to make a bronze snake and put it on a pole, and that everyone who has been bitten and looks at it will live (cf. *Num* 21:8).

This mysterious symbol is used by Jesus to show how he will give us Divine Life. Just as the bronze Serpent healed those who were on their deathbeds after being bitten by the snakes (evoking the drama of the sin of our first parents), in the same way Jesus will give life to all those

who “look on him whom they have pierced” on the Cross (cf. *Jn* 19:37).

The message that Jesus announces to Nicodemus is an invitation to welcome the life that God offers us and, like the Israelites in the desert, be healed of our wounds and wretchedness. We can attain Life with a capital letter if we look at and have our heart set on Christ Crucified.

Martín Luque

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